


# DEADLIFT DYNAMITE

HOW TO MASTER  
THE KING OF  
ALL STRENGTH  
EXERCISES



By Andy Bolton  
and Pavel





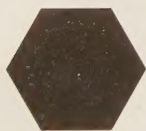
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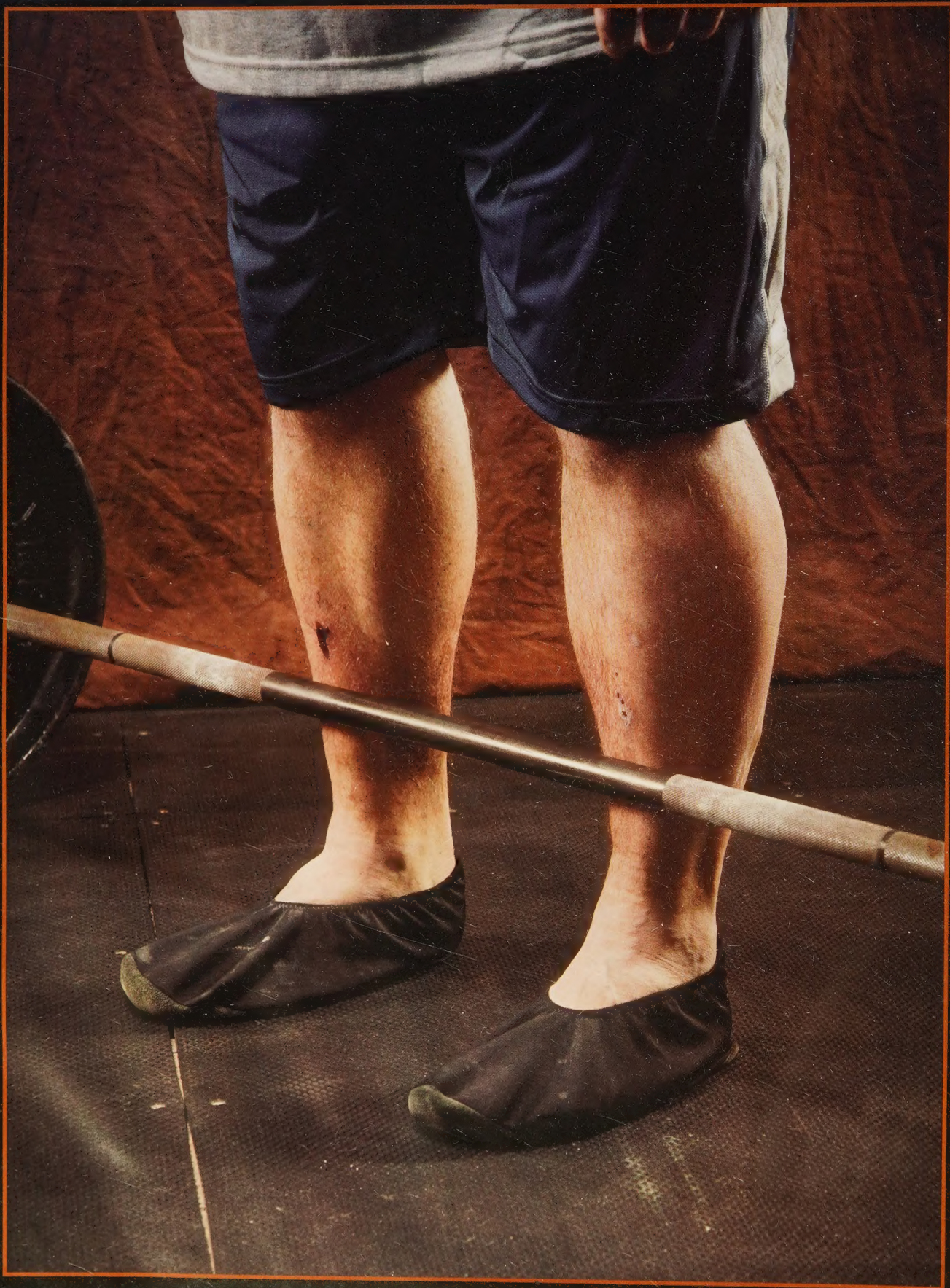
## **NOTE ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

When **Andy Bolton** is writing, it will appear in this typeface.

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When **Pavel** is writing, it will appear in this typeface.







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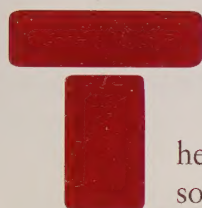
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# The Most Important Exercise You Will Ever Do



he reason why this book focuses on the deadlift is because the deadlift is an awesome movement.

However, there are other awesome movements:

Squat  
Bench press  
Military press  
The Olympic lifts  
Pull ups

So why not them?

The squat is too technical and requires a power rack or a very good squatter in order to train it safely.

The bench press and military press don't train the lower body hard enough—and every strength athlete worth his weight in protein powder knows that the foundation for all sports is a strong lower body.

Would I rather have an athlete with a 500lbs squat or a 400lbs bench?—I'll take the strong squatter every time, thank you very much.

The Olympic lifts are awesome, but very hard to learn—and do not allow as much weight to be lifted as the deadlift.



Finally, pull ups really build the back, but so does the deadlift, and the deadlift also builds the legs and glutes... so in terms of 'bang for your buck', it wins every time.

So, the deadlift builds the entire body from head to toe. It is relatively easy to learn and needs minimal equipment and no spotters.

Oh, and it trains the hell out of your grip.

And grip strength is important in many sports. Judo, wrestling, jui jitsu, tennis, golf, rowing—I could go on but I think you get the idea.

The deadlift rules.

It builds and tests maximal strength like no other movement.

In mid 2011, I was fortunate to start making friends with Pavel. After several conversations it became obvious that we shared a common interest—the iron game.

What makes Pavel and I a perfect match to write a book together are the unique perspectives and areas of expertise that we bring to the table. I've competed at the very highest level in powerlifting and won—many, many times. I've also set dozens of records.

I also believe that I have one of the most efficient training styles in the world of strength. Training 3 times a week, I've totally kicked ass and become the most successful deadlifter of all time. Meanwhile, many of my rivals have trained up to 14 times per week and still come second best. In this busy world that we all live in, efficiency rules.

Pavel brings his own excellence to the party. He understands stretching, mobility and core strength on a level that not only I, but 99.99% of lifters and coaches in the iron game do not. He has also spent time with some of the best athletes in the world. Needless to say, we bring a lot to the table. Pavel is also an accomplished athlete himself.

So when all is said and done, if you wanted two guys to take you by the hand and teach you how to build a big deadlift, add muscle, strength, speed and power—we are about as qualified as it gets!

---

**P**

This book is really two books.

The first chapter, "How to Lift", will show a newbie how to get started right in the iron game, avoid the typical mistakes and years of frustration, and see extraordinary results in his first year of training. This chapter is also for the guy who has been reading too many forums and has been doing it all wrong. And for the coach who is ready to start producing champions.

It does not matter whether your goal is to excel in the sport of powerlifting or you just want to become strong and muscular—**Deadlift Dynamite** is for you. There are many approaches to muscle and strength building, some effective, more marginal, most nearly worthless. Powerlifting's half century of existence has undeniably proven that this sport offers the most time-efficient methods for making one big and strong.

What brought Andy and I together as co-authors was the perfect fit between his record-tested lifting technique and training methodology, and my RKC system. For instance, Bolton's deadlift and the RKC kettlebell swing look identical!

When I taught a seminar at the Westside Barbell Club several years ago, Louie Simmons summarized what I do: "You have reverse engineered what my strongest guys do naturally." My goal is to compress the period it would take you to master championship lifting technique, like Andy's, from decades to years and even months—while avoiding the many health problems lifters who train incorrectly develop along the way.

I will also teach you state of the art flexibility and mobility exercises specific to lifting—exercises which have received a thumbs up from the elite of the iron game. The secondary goal of these exercises is health and longevity. The primary goal is strength. Consider that Louie Simmons added 50 pounds to his deadlift lockout as soon as he started doing the RKC hip flexor stretch.

Andy Bolton, as all great lifters, understands the importance of generating maximal tension throughout the body in order to lift a record weight. This is another one of my specialties. Consider that the RKC-style plank has been documented to generate 200-400% greater tension in the abdominals than the traditional plank. On these pages you will find a detailed section on cutting edge abdominal and tension training.

Programming, like cooking, is best when there is only one cook in the kitchen. I will leave Chef Bolton alone there. His master dish is the classic template of Coan, Gallagher, and Karwoski with his own unique flavor added.

The second chapter—or rather the second volume—"How to Lift More", is aimed at the experienced lifter. We go into great detail describing the subtleties of the world class deadlift technique and teach you state-of-the-art assistance exercises.

While we give the squat and the bench press the attention they deserve, the deadlift is our main event and the focal point of the book.

Deadlift power to you!








# CHAPTER 1

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## How to Lift

leafed through a copy of a popular fitness magazine while waiting for my dentist's appointment. Like a music video shot for high schoolers with ADD, it nearly gave me a headache. A blur of color, "tweet" style blurbs about nothing, and photos of idiotic exercises Rif derides as "random acts of variety".

If you are used to this kind of fare, do us a favor and give this book to a better man.

Heavy iron is not forgiving to amateurs. Which is why Andy and I shall attempt to instill in you a professional's attention to detail right from the start. Our progressions are very gradual and our technical descriptions are exhaustingly detailed.

## How to Deadlift

Andy's deadlift style not only allows one to put up crazy poundages, but also provides a great carryover to other events such as jumping and sprinting, due to its hip-dominant technique. Did you know that "The Jack" was a highly accomplished sprinter in his pre-powerlifting days?



## *Hip hinge*

Bolton's DL is mostly a hip hinge, with the knees bending only as an afterthought. This is what we call a "Hardstyle pull" at the RKC School of Strength. You will start your deadlift journey by practicing hip hinging. The drill looks like a good morning or a Romanian deadlift.

Stand with your toes and the balls of your feet elevated on a 2x4 or similar size object (this trick by Jeff O'Connor, Master RKC will teach you to keep your shins vertical). Place your feet a little narrower than your shoulders and point them straight ahead. Do all your DLs and DL-related training barefoot or in minimalist shoes with a flat and thin sole. This is essential for safety and performance.





Place the edges of your palms into the creases where your pelvis and thighs meet. Look straight ahead and press your hands back hard into your “hinges”. Push your pelvis back at the same time. Slowly. Farther and farther back—not down. Allow your knees to naturally flex a little; do not keep them locked.



Your weight will shift to your heels. You will feel a stretch in your hamstrings. Have someone look at you from the side. Your lower back should maintain a natural slight arch.

When you cannot go any farther, straighten out your body by tensing your glutes—imagine cracking a walnut with your cheeks.



Do this hip hinge stretch for five to ten repetitions, moving slowly but strongly. Push your pelvis back visualizing that you must reach a distant wall with it. Hopefully you will be able to hinge deeper after your set. Do not hold your breath.



Repeat the drill, while bear-hugging a barbell plate—a “quarter” for most, a forty-five for big guys—against your sternum. The weight will help your balance and will increase the stretch.

Do a couple of sets. Not only are you working on flexibility; you are learning how to move from your hips, while immobilizing your spine and keeping your shins vertical.



# If your hamstrings are tight

Andrew Read, RKC Team Leader, has a simple stretch for you:

"Lie on your back with your feet up against a wall, the legs straight. As your body relaxes, inch your butt closer to the wall. Once you can lie on the ground with your legs straight, your back flat against the floor, your butt right up to the wall, you'll be flexible enough for most things." At least for the powerlifts. "The key to being able to wait out stretches is to be comfortable. My right hamstring is a mess, torn off the bone, reattached, but never the same and always tight. Some days I have to spend 20 minutes or more waiting for it to relax. Standing in one spot waiting for twenty minutes is unfeasible. The only way to do it would be sit or lie. I tend to grab a book and just hang out until I get to where I want to be."

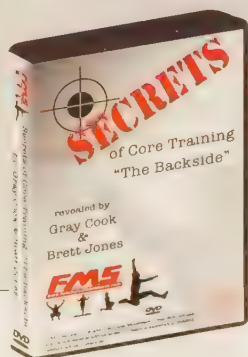


Patently practice this stretch almost every day—just not the first thing in the morning and not before lifting. This is the rule of thumb for all passive stretches.



Photos courtesy Dr. Michael Hartle, Senior RKC

If one of your hams is noticeably tighter than the other, stretch one leg at a time.



I strongly recommend *Secrets of Core Training: "The Backside"* DVD available from [www.dragondoor.com](http://www.dragondoor.com). The authors, Gray Cook, RKC and Brett Jones, Master RKC, show how to tackle dangerous asymmetries that could prevent you from achieving a big pull.

When you have got it, get rid of the 2x4s but keep moving the same way—without letting your knees slip forward.

When you are comfortably and crisply hip hinging deep enough to drop your arms and grab a barbell without losing your back alignment or letting your knees drift forward—this may take minutes or months—you are ready to move on to the next step.



***Touch-and-go kettlebell  
sumo deadlift***



## Which style is stronger: conventional or sumo?

In the conventional style the lifter keeps his feet narrower than his shoulders and grips the bar outside his legs. The sumo stance is wider and the arms are inside the knees at the start of the pull.

The sumo versus conventional debate is decades old and pointless. Historic world records have been brought down with both stances. Conventional: Andy Bolton, Lamar Gant, Konstantin Konstantinov... Sumo: Ed Coan, Max Podtinny, John Inzer...

In a nutshell, the sumo's main advantage is the shorter distance the bar has to travel. The conventional stance's ace of trumps is the higher level of arousal it tolerates. Conventional pullers like Kirk Karwoski work themselves into a blind rage, something sumoists like Tom Eiseman cannot afford, due to the greater precision demanded by the wide stance.

Every lifter has to find his own answer to the question, "Which style is better?"



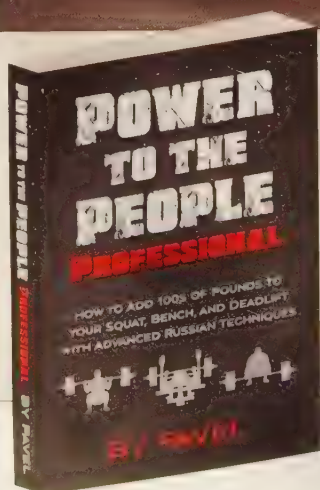




Generally, if you have a short back and you are a psych lifter, the conventional style is your best bet. A composed lifter with a longer spine is most likely to succeed with sumo.

Jason Marshall, RKC Team Leader, who is demonstrating a number of techniques in this book prefers the ultrawide sumo and has pulled a drug free raw 601 @ 181 in this manner.





Russian sumo deadlift technique is covered in great detail in *Power to the People Professional*. In *Deadlift Dynamite* we use the kettlebell sumo deadlift as a lead up exercise for mastering the conventional pull.





It is easiest to learn your DL in the sumo style first, with the weight between your legs.

Stand with your feet a little wider than your shoulders and your toes turned out a little, considerably less than 45 degrees. Grip the ground with your toes. Eastern European research by Vladimir Janda shows that this increases your midsection activation by up to 30% and fires up your glutes.

Straddle your kettlebell, its handle in line with the center of your feet or slightly behind.

If you have a very large chest and shoulders, use two kettlebells.

If you do not have a kettlebell, you may lift a dumbbell parked on its side like a can.

Take a breath and sit back—hip hinge. Do not move your neck at all on descent—imagine that you are an insect with your head and your torso forming one rigid block. This means that you will start out looking straight ahead and end up looking at a spot on the floor 6-10 feet in front of you by the time you have hinged low enough to grab the bell.

## Is this the “ideal” neck position?

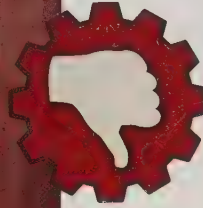
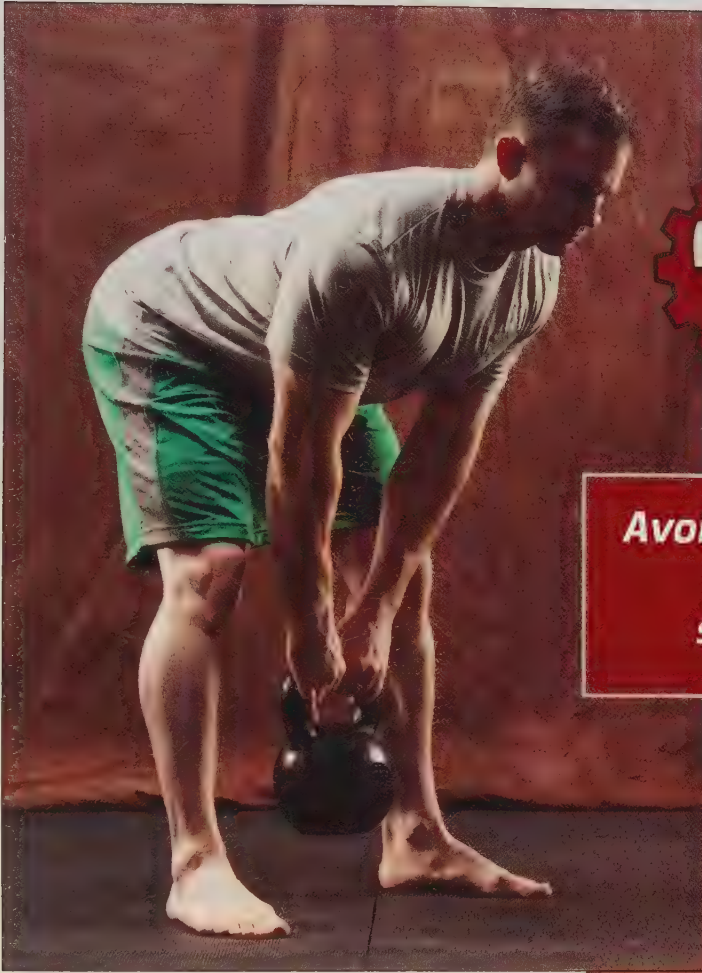
The optimal neck position in the DL is a hotly debated topic among powerlifting coaches and physical therapists these days. There is more than one correct answer, as witnessed by a variety of alignments used by world record holders. Do not fall for the common beginner’s trap—listening to too many authorities, getting confused, and going nowhere. We have picked one effective technique for you—use it and do not question your orders.

Push your knees out slightly, just enough for them to track your feet. Keep your shins close to vertical. The 2x4s hopefully have taught you how. Do not lose the hamstring stretch. “During the descent the leg muscles should be stretched like a bow and prepare for the return movement,” instructs Russian powerlifting coach Askold Surovetsky.

Avoid the two extremes—stiff-legging and squatting too low. Mike Mentzer described the deadlift as being halfway between a deep knee bend and a toe touch. This halfway alignment will give you the most power.

There is a saying in powerlifting: the harder it is to get down, the easier it is to come up. Surovetsky stresses a very focused descent to the bar: “...an easy, unfocused descent to the bar leads to serious negative consequences. First, you will have a harder time assuming the correct starting position and preparing all the muscles for the beginning of the movement. Second, you will end up lowering the pelvis more, which will increase the distance of the lift. The preparation phase is a very important part of the movement which is often ignored in training.”





**Avoid the two extremes—  
stiff-legging and  
squatting too low.**



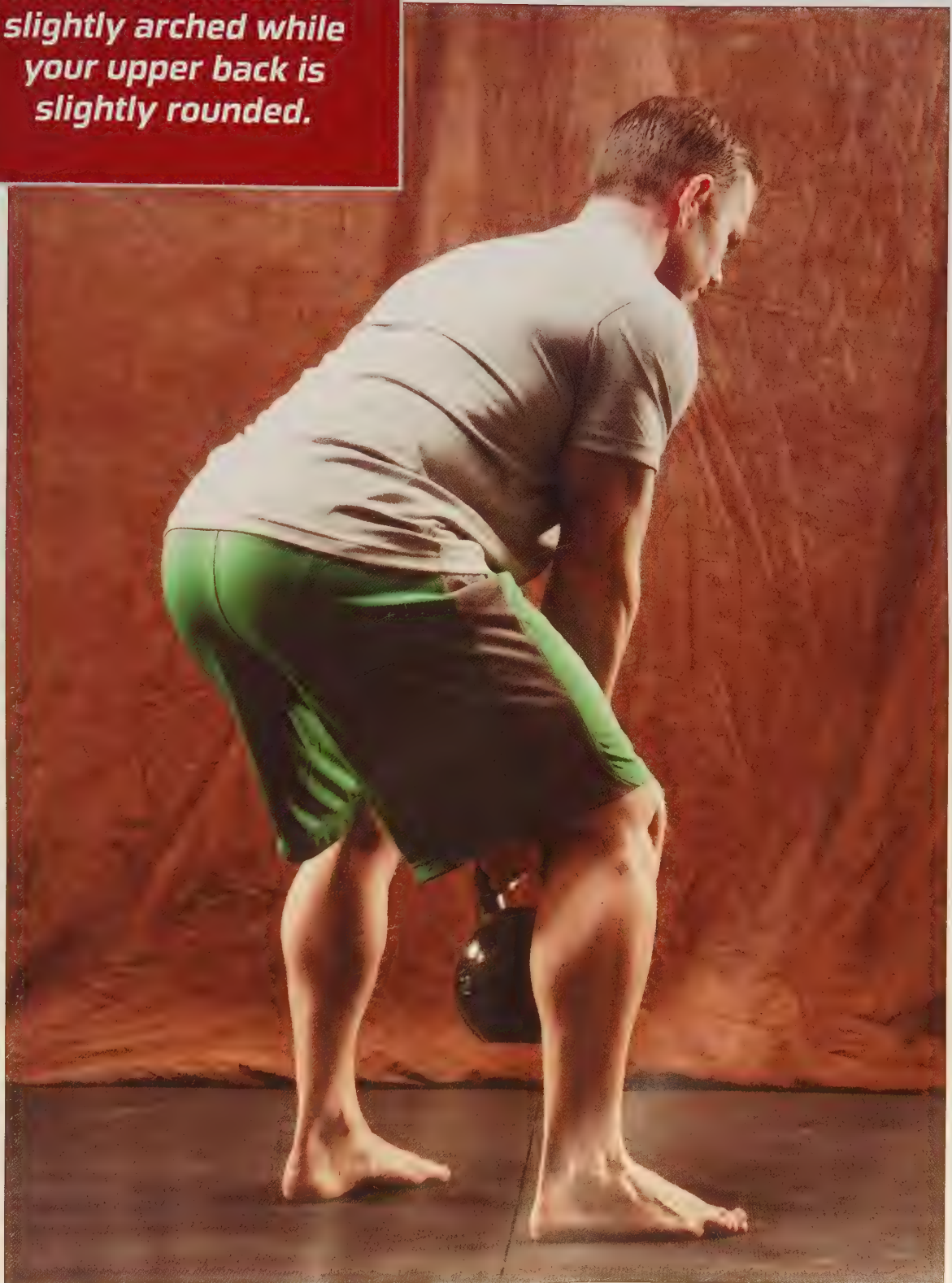
Without looking at the bell, reach for it with “long” arms. Do not collapse your chest or upper back. No need to arch and puff up like an Olympic weightlifter; just do not get a hump. While some of the greatest pulls in history have been put up in a hunchback style—consider Vince Anello or Konstantin Konstantinov—it is not for beginners. Even among the elite, very few are built for it.

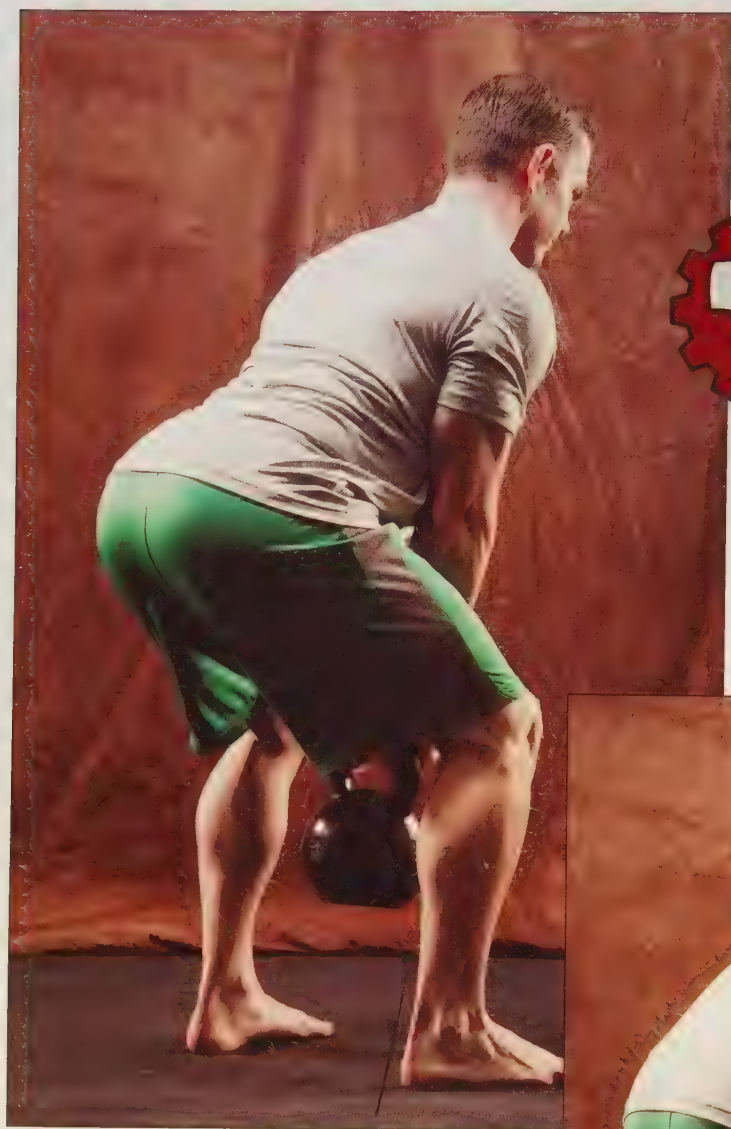
Your shoulder blades should flare some. Your lower back should be slightly arched while your upper back is slightly rounded.





*Your shoulder blades should flare some. Your lower back should be slightly arched while your upper back is slightly rounded.*







## Why not deadlift with a big chest like a weightlifter?

According to some experts, deadlifting with the shoulder blades flared fails to work some mid-back muscles like the rhomboids and sets one up for unbalanced development and a very sore middle back. Fair enough, if all you do for the back is deadlifts with a relaxed upper back, this will happen.

One way to deal with this problem is by deadlifting like an Olympic weightlifter—with the shoulder blades pinched and the chest out. It works—if you are content with not reaching your deadlift strength potential.

Partially protracted scapulae—and a chest that is not inflated—shorten the distance one has to pull and thus increase the amount one can stand up with. Besides, once the weight gets heavy enough, you shall assume this posture—whether you like it or not. So you might as well practice the way you are going to play from the very beginning. It is a decidedly bad idea to have different techniques for light and heavy weights. Masters like Andy Bolton understand this. Several years ago I watched him pull 900+ at the Arnold Classic. I also saw Andy warming up with 135 and his technique was identical to that of the big pull. “Act like your light lifts are heavy, so your heavy lifts will feel light,” an axiom powerlifting great Ernie Frantz nailed a couple of decades ago.

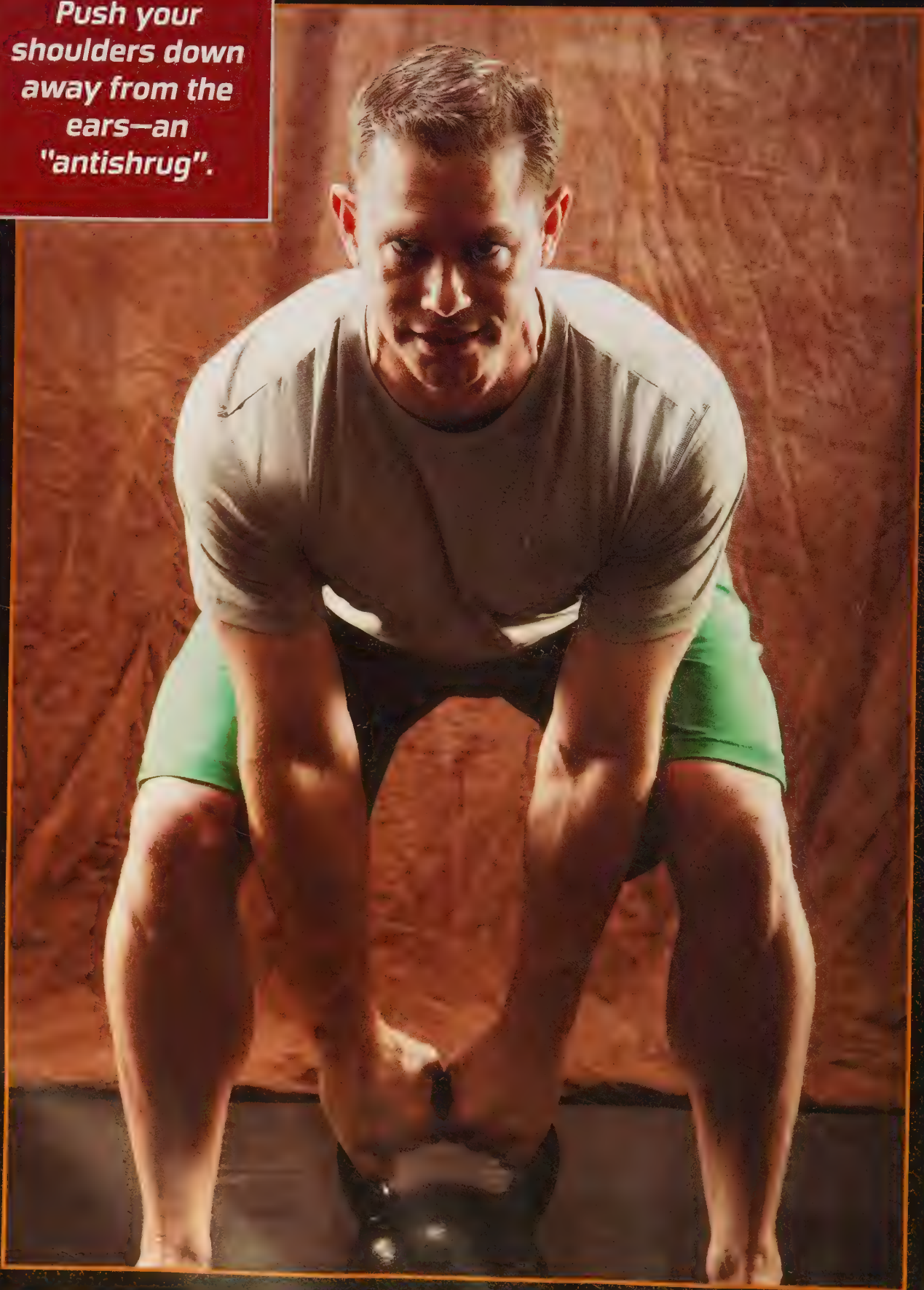
But what about the pain in the weakened mid-back?—There is neither pain, nor weakness, thanks to a generous helping of rows, in Bolton’s methodology. Not only do the rows round up the back development for deadlifts, they help the bench press go up and the shoulders stay healthy. More on this later.

Push your shoulders down away from the ears—an “antishrug”. If you pay attention, you will get a cramp in your armpits. And your waist will feel more stable.

Keep sitting back while keeping your weight over the center of your feet or slightly towards your heels.

At the point where your “long” arms have reached the bell you are looking at a spot on the ground 6-10 feet in front of you. Grip the kettlebell handle, then try to “break” it to increase your lat activation. “Break” it from your armpits, not just from your hands. When you find your lats, your deadlifts will feel stronger and safer.

***Push your  
shoulders down  
away from the  
ears—an  
"antishrug".***






Stand up ramrod straight. Don't think about lifting the kettlebell but focus on your feet, visualize stomping them through the ground.

Take a breath and sit back again. Do not think about putting the bell down as this intention is likely to get your back in trouble. Instead, focus on sitting back and use your lats to guide the kettlebell into the precise spot between your feet. Keep "breaking" the handle.

When the kettlebell has brushed the ground, stand up. Inhale on the way down and exhale on the way up. Repeat for a couple of sets of five.

A full-body photograph of a man in a white t-shirt and green shorts, standing barefoot and holding a kettlebell with both hands between his feet. He is in a deadlift stance, leaning forward with a flat back. The background is a textured, reddish-brown wall.

***Stand up  
ramrod straight.***

## The ascent

Visualize a jump with your knees and hips straightening out simultaneously.

Your butt should never—ever!—rise faster than your shoulders when you do any kind of a deadlift. It is important to drive this crucial point home early on. When the weights get heavy, it will be very tempting to lead the lift with your tail. Here is why your body makes such a poor decision.

From the standpoint of minimal energy expenditure, no technique can beat bending over and picking something up with a rounded back and nearly locked knees. Because most of the work is done by the ligaments. The problem is, you will miss your back when it is gone. Eric Cressey, a smart strength coach with an impressive 661 @ 165 deadlift, has stressed: "...the most "efficient" way is not always the right way. In everyday life, efficiency for someone with poor posture means picking up a heavy box with a rounded back, as it's the pattern to which they're accustomed, and therefore less "energy expensive." This would simply prove to be an efficient way to get injured! I'd rather lift things safely and inefficiently."

Marty Gallagher likes to say that in the DL "everything must arrive at once". By extension, everything must travel at once as well. As in a jump.

The intent of "pushing the floor away", while keeping the torso locked, helps.

## The lockout

Stay with the same drill—the touch-and-go sumo kettlebell deadlift—and focus on the lockout.

Straighten out your body without thinking about lifting the kettlebell.


"Pull up your kneecaps" and "crush a walnut" with your glutes on the top of the DL.

Slightly push your pelvis forward. Do not lean back! There is a big difference between driving the hips slightly forward and leaning back and jamming your spine. "Minimize spine power—maximize hip power," insists Prof. Stuart McGill. "The "power" in the protected athlete comes from the hips, not the back. Many studies have shown that the superior weightlifters develop relatively higher hip power and lower back power than their poor performing colleagues. Even in the much slower moving powerlifters the ratio between higher hip and back torque characterize better deadlifters as do the squatters."

Bring your shoulders back slightly. Overdoing it will not make your lower back happy. Underdoing it will mean red lights in competition. Remember to keep "breaking" the kettlebell handle; it will help you put your shoulders in the right place.

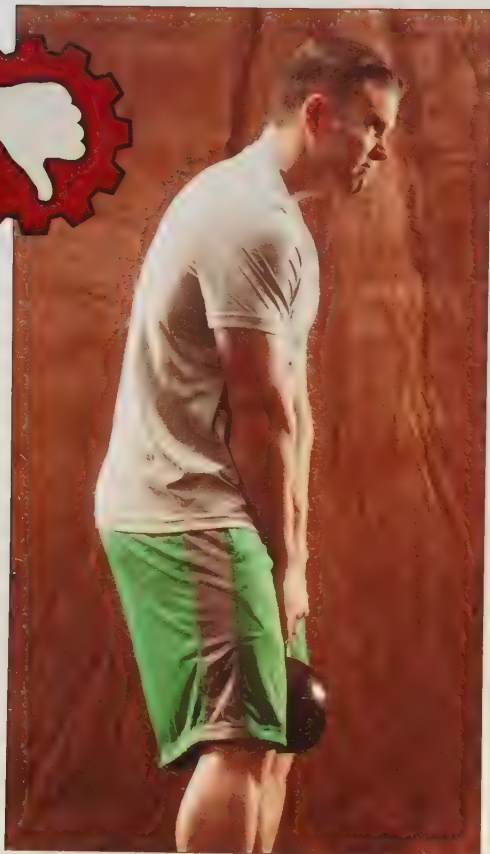
Brace your abs as you would if someone is about to punch you in the stomach (someone might).





*Bring your shoulders back slightly. Overdoing it will not make your lower back happy.*

*Brace your abs as you would if someone is about to punch you in the stomach.*





Chances are, your lockout does not look very convincing, even with a light kettlebell. Either you do not know how to use your glutes, or your hip flexors, the muscles opposite of the glutes, are tight. Or both. Enter the RKC shoulder bridge.

Lie on your back, bend your knees, and plant your feet as one would for crunches. Place a pair of tennis shoes or a similar sized object between your knees. Lift your toes, dig in with your heels, and lift your hips as high as possible. Keep squeezing the shoes with your knees; this will assure that you are extending your hips instead of hyperextending your lower back.



Pause momentarily on the top holding a maximal glute contraction, relax and come down. Repeat for several sets of five reps.

The goal is to come up high enough for your thighs and your torso to form a straight line. Keep practicing.



After each set of bridges, do a set of five touch-and-go sumo kettlebell deadlifts. Cramp your glutes in the same manner on the top.

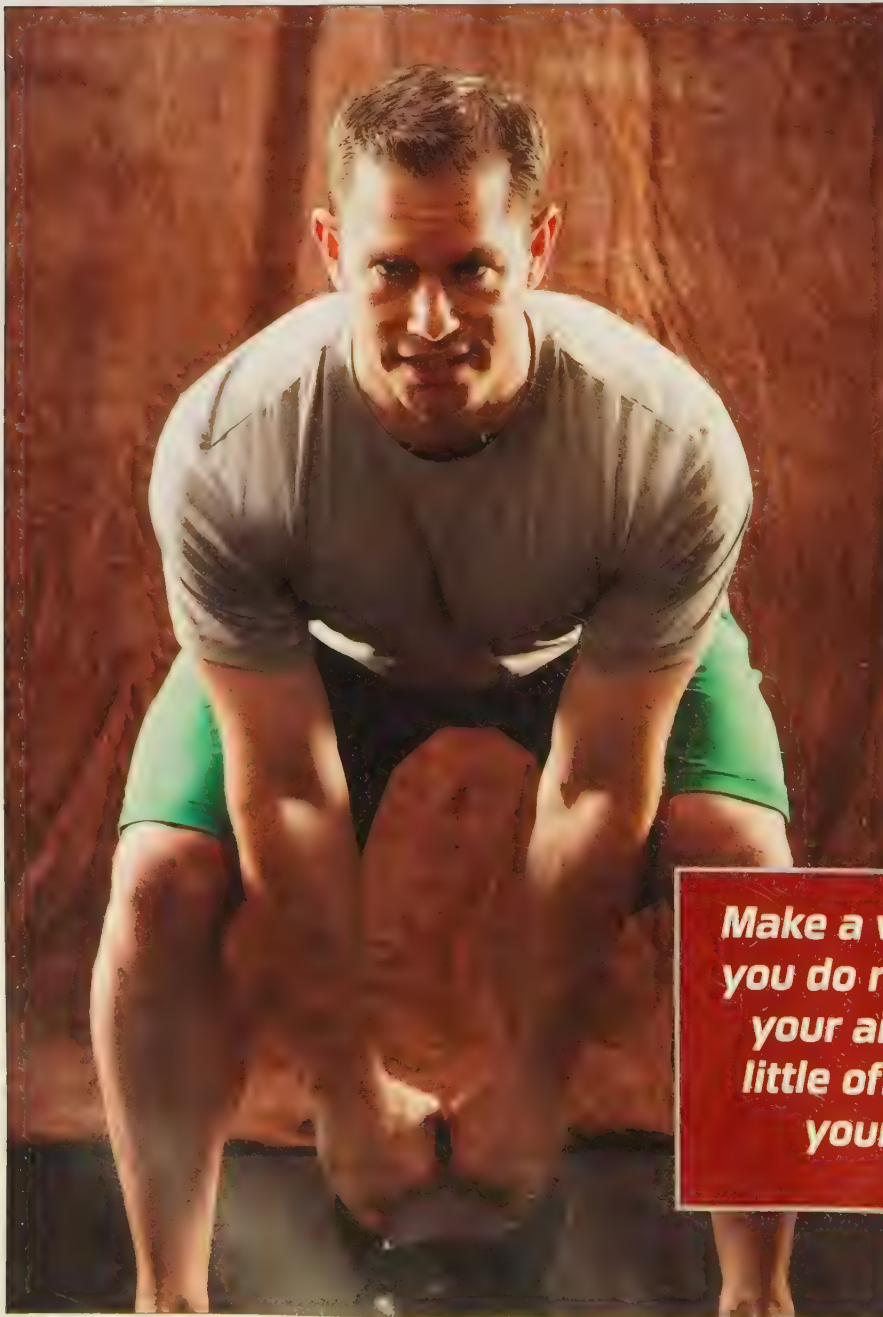
## ***Hardstyle breathing to brace the abs***

Your abs and the rest of your waist must be tight if you are to put up heavy weights in any lift, especially in the deadlift. The following technique will quickly teach you how to do it right.

Take a slightly bigger than normal breath on the bottom of your kettlebell DL through thinly pursed lips. Now press your tongue behind your teeth and hiss, trying to contract the abdomen. It is important to press hard with your tongue in order to leave only a very small opening for the escaping air. Think of your mouth as the nozzle of an air hose. When it is relaxed, air flows out freely and builds up no pressure. But when you press your tongue against

your teeth, as if to make the sound "TSSSSSS!!!" it is as if you have plugged the end of the hose with your thumb. Suddenly very little gas can escape and the pressure inside the tube goes way up.

Make a very short hiss; you do not want to lose your air, just bleed a little off to pressurize your abdomen. Make sure that this action does not make you lose your lower back arch.



***Make a very short hiss; you do not want to lose your air, just bleed a little off to pressurize your abdomen.***



By the time you have finished hissing, you should have your lung volume down to about  $\frac{3}{4}$  their maximal lung capacity. This is the optimal amount of air, according to Russian research. Too much air prevents one from tensing the abs adequately and too little does not build a big enough “bubble” of pressure inside the stomach.

Stand up holding your breath and maintain the midsection tightness.

Forcefully exhale some air—nowhere near all!—on your way to the top. Grunt! You are practicing for the big league.

Once you have locked out, take in more air without relaxing your waist and sit back to set the kettlebell down between your heels.

Let us do a dead stop set of five. Relax momentarily, take a breath and assume the perfect starting position, hiss a little, and stand up. And four more like it.

In the future, hissing is optional when you pressurize the abdomen and tense your abs before pulling. Some lifters do it; most do not.

## ***Barbell top-half deadlift***

We bet you cannot wait to get your hands on a barbell! The time has come. You will start with a half-deadlift because it demands less in skill and flexibility. And because it really teaches you to drive the hips forward, an essential element of Andy Bolton’s competition DL technique.

Set a bar inside a power rack just below your kneecaps and load it up with a pair of 45-pound plates. If you have wooden blocks on which you can park the bar, it is even better. The pull will feel more natural, your body will not be jarred, and the bar will hold up longer.

Stand flush next to the bar, your feet narrower than shoulder width apart, your toes pointing forward or slightly out.

Take a breath into your belly through pursed lips. Grip the ground with your toes and sit back, reaching for the bar with “long” arms, the triceps tensed. If you have been practicing your hinge stretch, your shins will be comfortably vertical and your lower back will remain straight.

Take a hold of the bar with a double overhand grip—for now. The perfect grip width demands that the arms are parallel to each other. Crush the bar with your hands. Jim Smith, RKC comments: “Locking your grip down on the bar is the FIRST step in setting the tension in your upper body and linking it to the tension created through your lower body from anchoring it into the ground, thus creating full body tension or irradiation. More tension equals more strength and less potential for injury.”







## "But another coach told me to relax my grip!"

Andy Bolton crushes the bar. Ed Coan tries to keep his grip loose. Both are deadlift superstars. Both are right in the context of their training systems. Pick one leader to follow.

Here is how we do it at the RKC. The word to Dr. Michael Hartle, Senior RKC, USAPL National Champion and IPF Team USA Head Coach:

*I crush the bar for squats, bench press and deadlifts. I was taught a long time ago to do that.*

*When squatting, it helps me stabilize my upper back and makes me feel locked into the bar, which makes the weight feel lighter.*

*In the BP, it helps immensely. When getting a lift-off for some heavy reps, it significantly reduces the "amount" of weight in hands. Psychologically it also helps, as I feel that I have better control with the weight overhead.*

*In the DL, it helps with my thoracic spine and upper back stabilization. Also, the weight feels lighter coming off the ground. As you well know, the grip is directly related to rotator cuff activation.*

"Break" the bar to activate your lats.

Hiss a little to get a better abdominal contraction.

Squeeze your glutes, drive your pelvis forward, and straighten out. Crisply. With a grunt. Your shins should not move at all—visualize that they are stuck in cement.

Pause for a second at the lockout. Make sure that your shoulders stay relaxed and down.

Take in some air and hinge back in a controlled manner. Eventually you will be doing this briskly, as slow deadlift negatives are not a good idea with a heavy weight, but that time has not come yet. Gently park the bar.

Keep the bar close to your legs with your lats throughout the set. This will improve your leverage and enable you to lift more weight safely.

As usual, do several sets of five.



## *The road to the platform*

At this stage in the game you need a lot of practice. Hence you will deadlift three times a week. Alternate barbell and kettlebell pulls: Monday—barbell, Wednesday—kettlebell, Friday—barbell, Monday—kettlebell, etc.

On your kettlebell days do 5x10 (5 sets of 10 reps) touch and go sumo. With two medium size bells of the same size, e.g. a pair of 53- or 70-pounders. Naturally, you will have to take a slightly wider stance. You may also use a 100+ pound dumbbell set on its side. These deads will be easy, and it is the point. You are just greasing your groove.

On your barbell days, do dead stop partial barbell pulls for 5x5. Progressively build up to a weight slightly higher than your bodyweight. 225 fits the bill for a regular size guy. A big guy will need about 275. Although you can probably handle a lot more weight from your knees, do not do it. Heavy lockouts are the domain of experienced lifters. Instead of adding weight, progressively increase the distance of the pull by setting the bar on lower power rack pins. Ideally progress in one-inch, or even half-inch, increments. Since most power cages have holes that are spaced much farther apart than that, figure out how to make smaller jumps by standing on sheets of plywood or rubber or on a forty-five pound plate.



## DEADLIFT DYNAMITE

Your short-term goal is 5x5 with 225-275. Do not drop to a lower level until you comfortably handle the weight at the previous one. Start using chalk when grip becomes an issue.







## *The mixed grip*

Stay with the double overhand grip until you reach the goal of 225-275x5x5 off the platform. Being challenged in this manner will not only strengthen your grip, but will teach you to pull the bar smoothly. Jerk—and it will roll out of your hands. But the time will come when you can no longer hold on to the bar. Enter the mixed grip.

Grip the bar with one palm facing forward, and the other back. If you have ever practiced martial arts or taken a self-defense class, you know that one thumb is weaker than four fingers. This is why you were taught to push against the assailant's thumbs to break his grip around your wrists. If you use a normal overhand grip on the bar, a heavy weight will eventually make your weaker thumbs give out. A mixed grip backs your thumbs up with the stronger fingers of your other hand. This maneuver will initially feel unnatural but you will get used to it. Experiment with the exact position of your hands on the bar to load your spine symmetrically. Do not presume that placing the hands on the bar symmetrically will do it.

***A mixed grip  
backs your  
thumbs up with  
the stronger  
fingers of your  
other hand.***



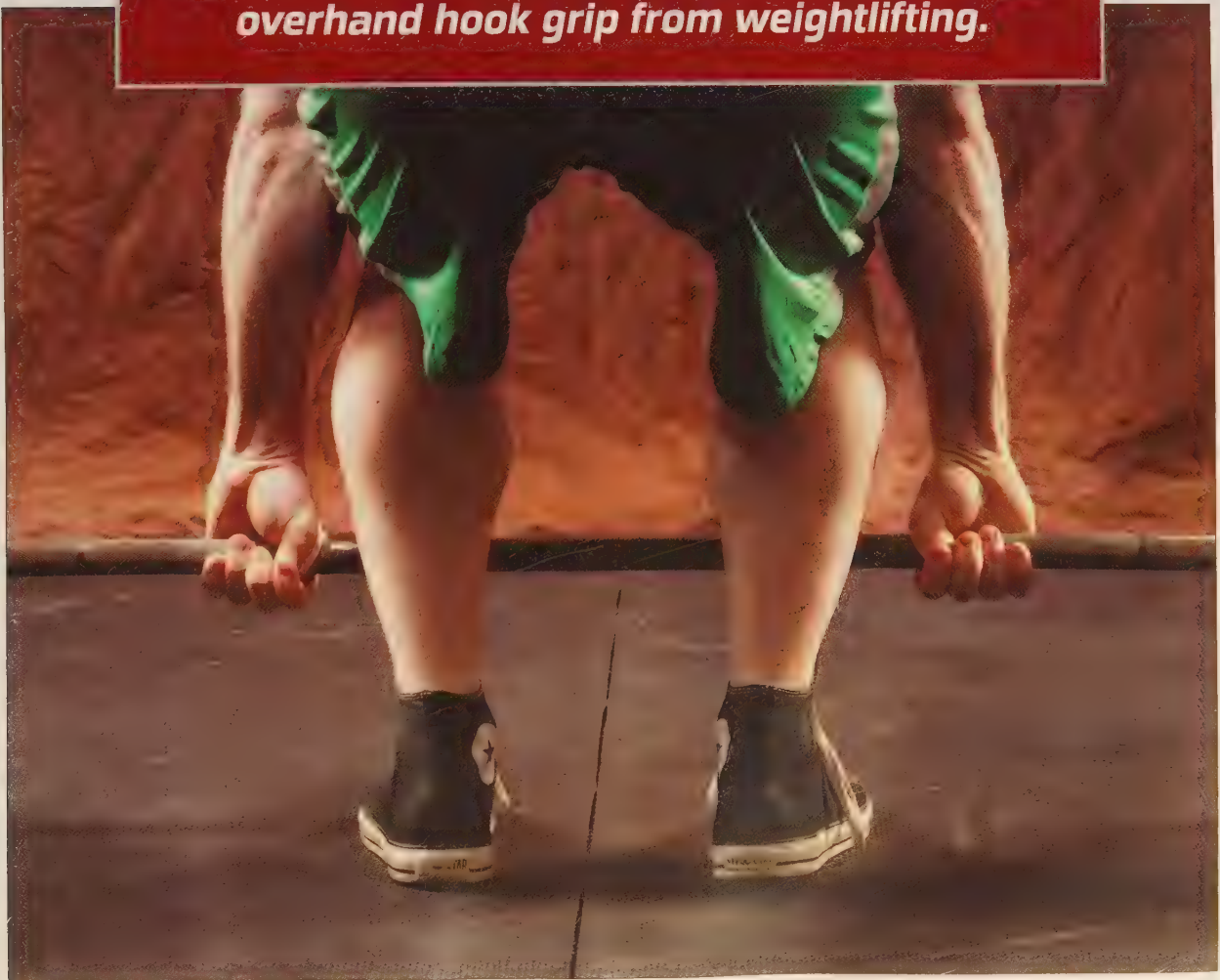


The mixed grip is not without problems. First, it creates a torque on your spine. Which is why you should switch hands from set to set. One way will feel stronger. Fine, always use it for your heavy sets. But make sure to grip the other way on many easier and warm-up sets.

Second, supinating your wrist, or turning your palm forward, makes the biceps vulnerable to an injury. It is absolutely imperative that you do not jerk on the bar and keep your elbows straight. Tense your triceps and think “long arms”.

An alternative to the mixed grip is the double overhand hook grip from weightlifting. It does not have the problems of the alternate grip; it has its own. The hook grip is rough on the thumbs. I saw Brad Gillingham a few days after he had pulled almost 900 at the IPF Worlds and he sported impressive bruises under his thumbnails. That said, you can get used to the pain. However, you will not be able to do reps without beating your thumbs to pulp. If you choose to pursue this Olympic weightlifting grip, use it only in warm-ups and for singles and doubles. You will need straps for your sets of five—and additional grip work, such as Andy’s double overhand grip shrugs.

***An alternative to the mixed grip is the double overhand hook grip from weightlifting.***



## ***Pulling yourself down to the bar***

All champion deadlifters know how to keep the muscles in their “hip hinges”—the hip flexors that raise your knees—tight at the start of the pull. This subtle skill will greatly increase your strength and back safety.

At first look it makes little sense—why would you want to fire your hip flexors if the goal of the deadlift is to extend the hips? When you dig deeper, you realize that there are many great reasons to do it.

First, one muscle of the hip flexor group, the psoas, originates on your lumbar spine. When you do situps with bad form and an arched back, it is the psoas that does the work. What is bad for situps is great for deadlifts—we want an arched lower back. And your “situp muscles” will help you.

Second, with your lower back arched, you will not only be safer, you will get more out of your glutes. An arch prestretches the glutes and gives them more power. An observation: deadlifters who pull with an arch have well developed glutes; those who roundback their pulls have flat butts. And strong glutes are essential for safety and performance.

Last but not least, mastery of the hip flexors is what allows Andy Bolton to quickly and precisely rock into a perfect deadlift starting position. You are not ready for a rocking start yet. For now you will be “pulling” yourself down to the bar in a slow “dive” as performed by another great deadlifter, Lamar Gant. You already have been sort of doing it. The following RKC drill will teach you how to do it better.

Lie on your back and place your hands in the small of your back to set a normal lumbar curve. Straighten out your legs, and place your feet on your training partner’s knees, wide as your deadlift stance. Dorsiflex your feet—pull your toes towards your nose. Your buddy will grab your insteps and give you some resistance. Pull your knees towards you without losing your DL stance and without allowing your head or tail to come up. Feel the muscles on the top of your thigh creases.



***Pull your knees towards you without losing your DL stance and without allowing your head or tail to come up.***



***Feel the muscles on the top of your thigh creases.***



Walk over to the bar, take a breath, tense your body, and use these newly found muscles to pull yourself down into the initial DL position. Visualize that you are wearing a DL suit or jeans three sizes too small and fight against their resistance. Keep your “hinges” tight as you squeeze the bar off the platform.

Once you have worked up to 225-275x5x5 off the platform with solid form, you are ready to employ the time tested powerlifting strategy of “cycling” explained in the end of the first chapter.

Deadlift power to you!



# The Bench Press: Here's Exactly How to Supercharge Your Pressing Power



he bench press is probably the most popular ‘gym exercise’ in the world—and if it doesn’t quite grab the title, it’s almost definitely only second to bicep curls.

It doesn’t matter whether you go to train at a hard-core lifter’s gym—full of powerlifters and guys who want to get really strong, or one of those sickeningly pathetic commercial gyms full of mirrors and machines or worse still, a ‘health and fitness’ set-up full of people doing very little except marvelling at the pretty surroundings and ironically achieving very little health or fitness...

You will find a lot of guys bench pressing.

That’s just the way it is.

But not all the guys bench pressing are created equal. You see, it’s only the guys in the hard-core gyms—the real men who actually compete in a sport or at the very least have a genuine passion for strength training—who you ever see perform their bench presses correctly (with good technique).

That leaves 99% of people performing their presses very badly indeed.

And if you press badly, you increase injury risk and make the chances of ever getting a strong bench press null and void. The goal of this chapter is to teach you to bench press raw (without a bench shirt) and to do so with great technique.





Never ever overlook technique. In all sports, great technique is one of the things that separates its elite performers from the pretenders. And while working on technique never seems as ‘sexy’ or ‘cool’ as trying to find a new training program, it is the most important thing you will ever do (as far as your strength training goes).

So right now, make a commitment with me that you will work on your bench press technique—every single time you set foot in the gym. You see, that’s the thing about technique...

You’ll start off with bad technique—everyone does. Granted, some worse than others; but nobody has great bench press form the first time they press. Then, you commit to mastery—and you get better and better over time. As you do so, your strength goes up and while all the regular guys have shoulders that are killing them pressing 205lbs, you work your way up to 315lbs without pain. Remember the ‘double whammy’—great technique reduces injury risk AND lays the foundation for massive strength gains.

With all that said, here’s...

## ***Exactly how to supercharge your pressing power by mastering your technique***

First off, you will need a bench.

The ideal bench press station is one like that made by Forza and used in some of the biggest powerlifting meets in the world. The great thing about the Forza bench is that the stands (where you rack the bar between sets) are adjustable. This means that you can find the perfect rack height for yourself and your training partners. Due to the design of this type of bench, you can quickly and easily adjust the rack height between sets if you are training with a partner or two who have different arm lengths than yours. The cheaper benches usually have just one or two options for where to rack the bar. If you are ‘average’ height, let’s say 5ft 10, you will probably be ok because these benches are usually made with the average man in mind. However, if you are taller or shorter, these benches will be a massive compromise because you will either have the bar too close to your face or too far away from your body when un-racking the bar. Both scenarios will reduce the quality of your training. So, the choice is yours. But the advice is to find a place to train that has a bench with adjustable stands.

Equipment you may use while practicing your raw bench presses:

- **Wrist wraps.** These go tightly around your wrists and give support in that area. Some lifters also feel like they increase grip strength because, when you have the wrist wraps on tightly, they naturally try to close your hand. Wrist wraps are optional and the bottom line is that you probably don’t need them unless you are a powerlifter. The exception to this rule is if you have weak wrists, as they could help you out massively. It’s your call.

- A belt. While a belt can add many pounds to the bar on squats and deadlifts, for the raw bench it is usually overkill and unnecessary—but if you want to wear one you can.

Now let's get down to working on your bench press technique...

## ***The bench press set-up***

The set-up is the position you must assume just before you un-rack the bar. When you set-up for your bench presses, you should have three points of contact with the bench. These are:

- Your head
- Your upper back and shoulders
- Your glutes

I should not need to say the following, but I will. After all, it's better to be safe than sorry...

Your feet should be in contact with the floor! Yes, there are plenty of guys who press with their feet on the bench or in mid-air—but we are not trying to join the circus, we are trying to press big and that requires a stable base. Much like a pyramid, your base will be as wide as possible because this provides maximum stability.

So set your feet wide and screw your heels into the floor.

Your heels will be more or less directly under your knees. Your glutes will be tensed as hard as possible. Do not even think about just passively letting your glutes rest on the bench. They must be tight.

Your upper back will be arched—think of squeezing your shoulders blades back and down and you will have the perfect position.

When you do all of this, there will be daylight between your lower back and the bench. How much daylight is up to you. Allow me to explain...

If you want to absolutely maximise your bench press numbers, you must reduce the range of motion (the distance that you have to press the bar). It's easier to press the bar 10 inches than it is 12, right?

Now, you cannot alter your arm length—unless you have some very dodgy surgery or a nasty accident. So, the way you reduce your range of motion is to arch more at the lower back. This forces your chest and stomach upwards, towards the ceiling.



You can see that by arching more, you reduce the range of motion and this will almost definitely allow you to lift more weight.

But—there is a trade-off...

The harder and higher you arch, the more dangerous a position you put your lower back in.

The bottom line is that it is your call. With that said, here are some things to think about when deciding how much you will force your arch on your bench press...

If you are a competitive powerlifter and need every last pound out of your bench press, you have permission to work your arch as high as possible. Although, you must remember that a bigger arch will fatigue the lower back muscles and you have to deadlift after you bench at the meet!

If you are a bench-only specialist, go for it and maximise your arch.

If you compete in a sport that is not powerlifting, the bench press becomes GPP (General Physical Preparation) for you—and in this case you should definitely not try to force a huge arch. After all, is it worth missing your sporting event because you tried to press another 2.5kg in the weight room and put your back out? I think not.

If you do not compete in anything, but simply enjoy strength training, it is your call. Go ahead and arch, just remember that you must do no harm. So if it ever hurts, back off and use an arch that you can handle without pain.

Regardless of whether you choose to force a big arch or not, you should keep the feet wide and firmly planted, your glutes tight and your shoulders pulled back and down (so that your chest is forced open).

Tip: After your bench training, hang from a pull up bar to decompress your spine. The more you force your arch, the more important this is.

How you get into the perfect bench press set-up is up to you.

In golf, every great player has a pre-shot routine that helps him get into his set-up quickly and easily. And he keeps this routine on every shot. You will see a similar thing in tennis when a player sets up to serve—he has a pre-serve routine.

You must do the same with your bench press. Find a way to set up and stick to it on every set. Just remember how the perfect set-up should look:

- Feet wide, heels under your knees
- Glutes as tight as possible

- Shoulders pulled back and down and upper back tight
- Head on the bench
- Daylight between your lower back and the bench (how much is up to you)





One other key point to remember is that when you set up, you want your eyes directly under the bar. You will realize why when you un-rack the bar and start pressing.



## Un-racking the bar

Let's be honest here... It is very difficult to bench press without a spotter (preferably a good training partner). So get yourself a spotter and then you will be able to do what is suggested in this section.

Training solo and heavy on the bench is a recipe for disaster.

Just before you un-rack the bar you must squeeze it very tightly. Turn your knuckles white.

In competition use your strongest grip (for most raw lifters this is a 'pinky on the ring' grip). In training you may vary the grip width. If you go narrow, do not overdo it to the point where you are stressing your wrists.

Next, take a deep breath into your belly—suck in all the air in the room through thinly pursed lips—and then your training partner will help you un-rack the bar. To synchronise this sequence, do this: Count 1, 2, 3, out loud. On 3, you take the deep breath and your training partner un-racks the bar with you (he should take most of the weight)

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**P**

You want your training partner to lift the bar out all the way over your lower chest. This is the starting point for your presses and at first it will feel unnatural. Your body is good at figuring out the best leverage for the moment, but it does not think several moves ahead. If holding the barbell in the top position was all there was to the bench, keeping the bar straight over the shoulders would have made sense. But, like a beginning chess player, your body does not realize that the game will change once the bar is down. Trust us, what feels weird and even scary on the top will give you the best leverage and minimal shoulder strain on the bottom. In powerlifting, like in chess, you must think many moves ahead.

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**AB**

You should still be squeezing the bar hard and you should still be holding your breath. During the un-racking process you must keep the tightness in your upper back. Do not allow your training partner to lift the bar so high out of the racks that it causes you to flatten out and lose that upper back position. If you do, your press will be weaker and less safe.

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**P**

You must use your lats when you are unracking and guiding the bar from the hooks to the starting position over your sternum. If you don't, your upper back will lose its arch and your shoulder blades will flare out. Bad news for your strength and your shoulders.

The drill that will help you master the skill of unracking and guiding the bar with the lats is a straight-arm cable pulldown with a light weight. Stand in front of the pulldown machine and place your hands on top of the handle. Lock your elbows. Take a breath, press your shoulders towards your feet—an "anti-shrug"—and keep them there. Then press the bar down until it is level with your sternum. At the same time force your chest out.



Eventually, pressing the shoulders and the bar down and the chest out should become one seamless movement. Practice in sets of two to three reps until you get it. Then try reproducing the sensation during the hand-off.

Back to the bench. Place the barbell at the right height. Russian coaches warn against using a high setting because an athlete who has to reach up to grab the bar invariably compromises his back position.

With your feet positioned and your arch set, lift your pelvis up and unrack the bar—always with a spotter, never by yourself if you are a powerlifter. Unracking is a key part of the competition skill.

Make sure to carry the bar far enough towards your feet to place it above your sternum or nipples. Remember the straight-arm pulldown feeling.

Retract your shoulders into their sockets, as a turtle pulls in its head, to give yourself maximal stability and shoulder safety and the shortest stroke.

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**AB**

Now that you have un-racked the bar, you are ready to press. To re-cap, here is how your bench press should look just before you begin to lower the bar:

- Feet wide
- Glutes tense
- Upper back tight and shoulders pulled back and down
- Squeezing the bar as hard as possible
- The bar is directly over your lower chest (sternum)
- You are still holding your breath

Once you are in this position and ready to press, the reality is that you will only hold this position for a second before starting to lower the bar. Any longer and you may run out of breath!

## ***Lowering the bar***

Here are the key points that you must follow when lowering the bar:

- Bring the bar down in a straight line. It should touch your lower chest (sternum or nipple line is fine).

- Lower the bar as quickly as possible while maintaining control. I'll repeat that... while maintaining control—you do not want cracked ribs because you came down too fast.
- Keep everything tight. Do not passively yield to the weight, but pull it down with your lats as if you are doing a row. At the same time force your chest to meet the bar.
- You may not flare the elbows; keep them in at an angle of approximately forty-five degrees.
- A tip for a precise descent: focus on lowering the elbows and the bar will follow.
- Your forearms must remain perpendicular to the floor.
- Do not allow your wrists to bend backwards.
- Try to 'load your feet' on the descent. This is a funny feeling but with practice you will get it. Basically you are trying to get the feeling that your legs are taking much of the weight. When you get this right, the bar will feel much lighter.





When the bar touches your chest, you have two options. Either press the bar straight back up (touch and go) or pause for a second or two on the chest and then press the bar back up to lock-out. The choice is yours and there is no right or wrong. The sensible approach would be to vary your training. Pause for four weeks, then touch and go for four weeks. Or, touch and go one week, pause your presses the next. You get the idea.

## ***Blasting the bar to lockout***

When the time comes to press the bar to lockout, you have to be aggressive. Press the bar in a straight line, as fast as you can and drive as hard as possible with your legs. To get that leg drive, push your heels into the floor as hard as possible.



There is also the idea of pulsing to consider. This involves getting even tighter at a certain point in a lift. On the bench press, as soon as the bar touches your chest, you squeeze your glutes and fists even more and drive your heels down into the floor even harder. This is an advanced concept, but a worthwhile one once you get to an intermediate level.

On the way up, hold your breath all the way to lockout. Alternatively, you may breathe out with the effort at your sticking point—but not before! If you choose to do this, you can also grunt with the release of breath. Many lifters find this a powerful move, much like a martial artist when he makes a noise with his punch.

Please understand that if you breathe out at your sticking point, you must breathe through pursed lips and you must stay tight. If you lose tightness under a heavy weight, you will crumple like a tower made of cards and the bar will come crashing down on your chest—causing your spotter to earn his pay.

Stay tight under the iron. Always stay tight.

When many lifters press the bar, they allow it to drift back towards their face. Avoid this at all costs because it lengthens the movement (meaning you have to push the bar further) and it is a nasty movement for the shoulders. So keep the bar moving in a straight line—the shortest point from A to B.

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**P**

**Do not flare your elbows until the sticking point!**

Watch a newbie or a bodybuilder bench. He will flare his elbows and keep them that way. Sooner or later he will get hurt. Such pec dominant technique is very rough on the shoulders.

Now watch one who has been around the barbell. He will keep his elbows tucked in and only will spread them when going through the sticking point. The experienced lifter knows that if he flares too soon, he might get hurt and he will rob himself of an extra boost when he needs it most.

A novice or a bodybuilder will find that this technique will initially reduce the poundage he can lift. It happens because his triceps are weak. Do not give up. Patiently practice the new elbows in groove, build up your tris—and you will lift more than ever—and with a much smaller chance of an injury.

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**AB**

**When you have successfully driven the bar back to your starting position, either rack the bar in the stands or take in a little more air and repeat for reps.**

So there you have it—exactly how to bench press like a pro. Practice this technique each and every time you hit the gym. Some days will feel better than others, such is life. But by committing to mastering your technique you are setting yourself up for maximal strength gains and minimal injury risk. A pretty sweet combination.



# How To Squat 1,214lbs The Andy Bolton Way



If you read this chapter carefully and implement what I am suggesting you do, I cannot promise that you will actually squat 1,214lbs. However, I can tell you that you will squat more than you ever have done before and you will do so with less chance of injury.

If that sounds good to you, read on with interest because your squat is about to explode...

The squat is my second favorite lift, (the first being the deadlift) and my squat of 1,214lbs makes me one of only a handful of men to ever squat in excess of 1,200lbs. That is a pretty big number (551kg) and all I can tell you is that that feels like the weight of the world pressing down on your shoulders.

I squatted such a weight by training hard and with a carefully thought out training plan, but above all else, I did it by perfecting my technique. Indeed, in the world of sports, technique rules. Improving your technique is the fastest way for you to get stronger and simultaneously reduce your risk of injury.

In this chapter you will discover how to perform a perfect powerlifting squat. The powerlifting style squat has several advantages over other types of squat. For starters, it does the best job of overloading the posterior chain (hamstrings, glutes, lower back). For this reason, this style of squat is where you have the potential to lift the highest numbers, because it makes the most of the strongest muscles in your body.

The second major benefit of the powerlifting style squat is the fact that it is kinder on the knees than other styles of squat. When you perform the powerlifting style squat you will 'sit-back' and try to keep your shins as vertical as possible. As a result of this, your knees will not drift too far forwards. This is what makes the powerlifting style squat safer on the knees than other styles that do allow the knees to drift forward a lot.





# What is the difference between a squat and a deadlift?

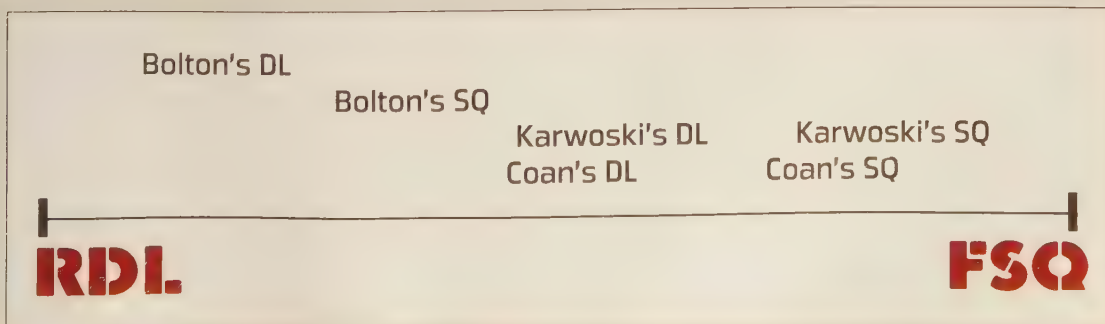
**P** The answer to this question is not as obvious as it seems. For some elite lifters like Kirk Karwoski, their deadlift is a “squat with the bar in the hands”. For others, like Andy Bolton, their squat is a “deadlift with the bar on the back”.

Are you confused yet? You should be. The following technical discussion might make it worse. Feel free to skip it.

Let us forget for the moment where the bar is—on your back or in your hands. The variable to watch is the amount of knee flexion (and ankle dorsiflexion which comes with it) relative to the hip flexion in the bottom position. If we step away from the sport of powerlifting and speak in terms used by strength coaches from other sports, we could say that in the deadlift the hips do most of the bending with knee flexion happening as an afterthought. The extreme version of the deadlift is the Romanian deadlift. And in the squat the knees bend as much as the hips. The extreme version of the squat is the bolt upright rock bottom front squat.

Dan John, Master RKC, has drawn up a “hip displacement continuum” with the former on the far left, the latter on the far right, and a lot of grey between these two black and white extremes. Bolton's deadlift is just a little to the right from the far left corner and his squat is center left. For comparison, Karwoski's deadlift would be flush in the middle and his squat a good deal right off center. Coan's lifts would be a little to the left of Captain Kirk's but not by far.

Some of these differences are due to individualization according to one's body type. And the rest are rooted in a radically different SQ and DL technique in the Cassidy-Gallagher school of powerlifting. There is more than one way to the top.





Great Ed Coan squatting his deadlift. Photo courtesy *Powerlifting USA*

For all their apparent differences, Bolton's and Coan's approach to handling their SQ and DL in a synergistic manner is the same. The latter squatted and pulled in the same stance, thus "doubling the power of the groove", as his coach Marty Gallagher would say. At first glance it does not seem to be the case for Bolton: what could a super wide squat and a conventional pull have in common? But for him they do: the vertical shins, the hip (as opposed to quad) dominance, and finally, the similarity in training poundages.

The vertical shins and hip dominance in Bolton's SQ assures a carryover to his DL. I doubt his SQ would help Konstantinov's quad dominant pull. No surprise, the Russian from Latvia does rock bottom Olympic squats as a deadlift assistance exercise.



The wide stance strengthens the glutes big time. Powerful glutes are essential for a world class pull—but it may be difficult to develop them to the max with conventional deads alone. One has two choices: go deep or go wide. Coan did the former. Bolton does the latter. Coan had to squat very deep in the federations he competed in. Some ankle dorsiflexion, necessitated by a greater depth, was not a problem for his deadlift, as his technique, heavily relying on quad strength, demanded a knees forward start. If Bolton squatted this deep, his knees would have slipped forward considerably and his SQ would no longer assist his DL, as he uses his vertical shins as "gun sights", aiming his superhuman hip power straight down into the platform.

You could say that the similarity in training poundages is another condition for one's squat to have a great carryover on his deadlift. Coan finished his career squatting 1,000 and pulling 900. Very close. It is ironic and unfair that lifters who pull a lot more than they squat oftentimes get very little carryover to their pulls when they make a great effort to push their squat up. For the very simple reason that the poundages they squat are too light to make their pulls notice. It is a matter of specificity. Andy's approach assures that your squats will be heavy enough to help your pulls even if you are not built to squat. Watch Bolton's training DVD. The combination of the mono-lift, the supportive gear, and the reduced depth he practices on many of his sets, assure that he has to work heavy. Heavy enough for his dead.


Andy's squat is essentially a good morning. Which, naturally, makes it a killer deadlift developer.

Before tackling the power squat you have a lot of work to do. A professionally executed squat demands impressive hip mobility. Without it you are not going to reach your strength potential and will probably jack up your back, hips, or knees—if not all of the above. The following proven methods will quickly loosen you up. Patiently work through the steps and do not rush to the bar.

## ***RKC face-the-wall squat***

Start with the face-the-wall squat. “This is a drill, not the skill,” warns Jeff O’Connor, Master RKC. It is a stretch, not your power squat groove.

Stand a couple of inches away from a wall, facing it, your feet a little wider than your shoulders and slightly turned out. Raise your straight arms to the sides until they are parallel to the ground. Turn your palms towards the wall and pinch your shoulder blades together. Keeping your feet planted—the big toes may not come up!—or turning your head sideways, squat down as low as you can.



***Raise your straight arms to the sides until they are parallel to the ground.***

***Turn your palms towards the wall and pinch your shoulder blades together.***





***Keeping your feet  
planted—the big toes  
may not come up!***



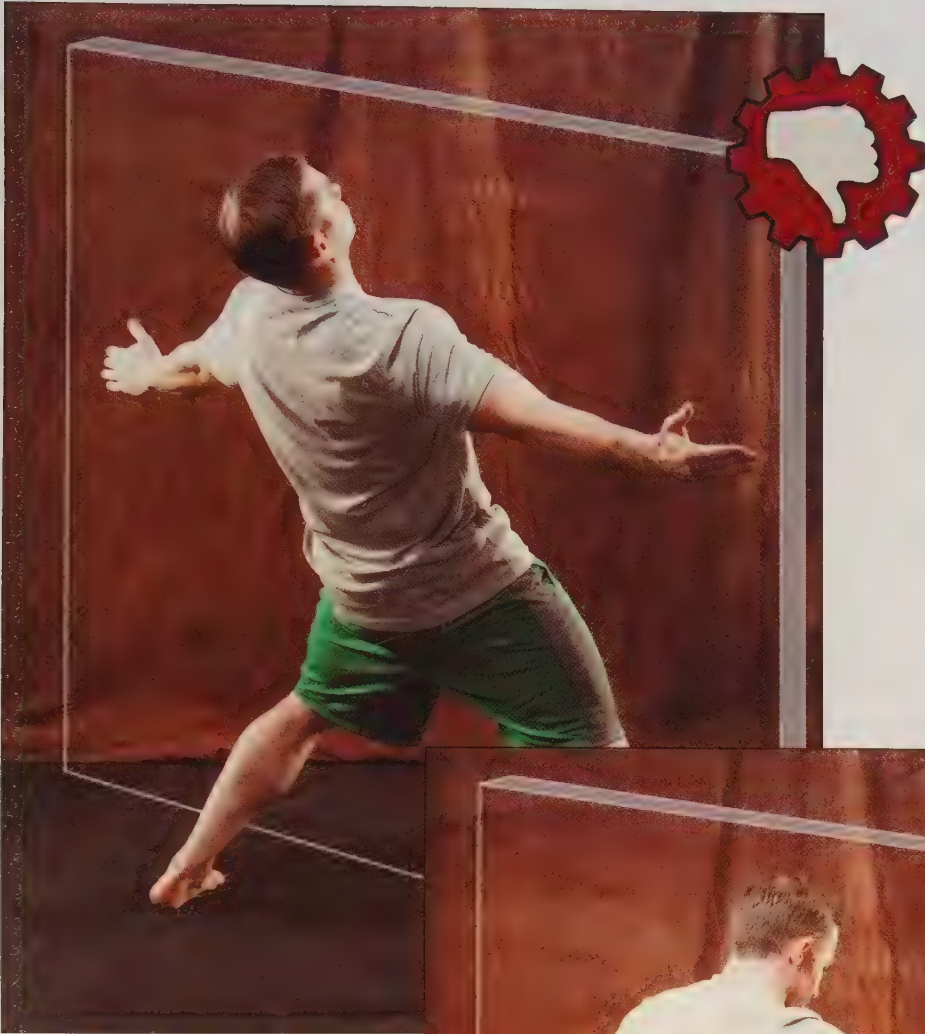
***Squat down as  
low as you can.***

You will notice that you cannot get past a certain point without pushing your chest out and arching your lower back. And if you insist on mindlessly and passively going down, you will quickly learn that not only will you fail to descend lower than a couple of inches, your forehead or knees will hit the wall and make you fall back.



***No turning your head sideways.***





Move slowly and deliberately; use your strength to pull yourself down. Force your knees out; they must track your toes—but not beyond. Breathe into your stomach.

When you get tired, either in your legs or in your back, stop, shake the tension off, and come back for more when you are rested. You will make the fastest gains if you do a few reps here and there throughout the day, every day.

Keep working your way down lower and lower until you reach the point when your thighs are parallel to the ground—the tops of your kneecaps above your hip creases. Don't go any deeper, instead stand closer to the wall and work your way down to parallel again. Adjust your stance to make your shins vertical.

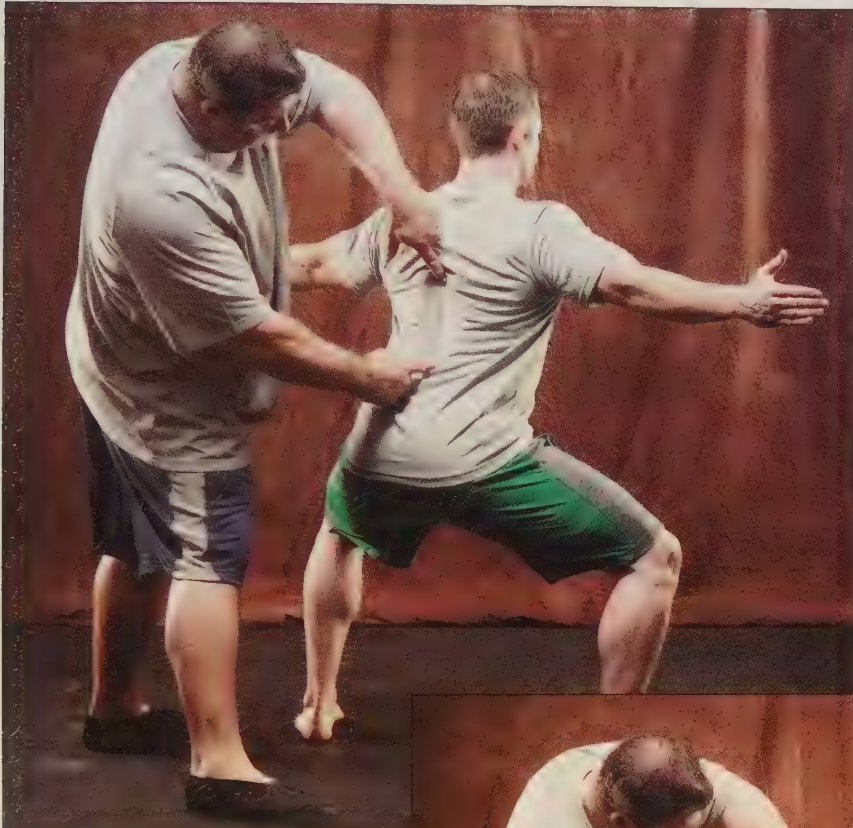
## ***The long spine***

Louie Simmons made an observation that in the deadlift you want to make your back short and in the squat long. A “long spine” has several benefits, including significantly more open hips. Later you will apply it to your barbell power squat. Right now, learn it in the context of the face-the-wall squat.





As you are squatting, have your training partner place his fingers in the middle of your spine, then drag both hands apart along the spine trying to “stretch” it “longer”. When the fingers of one hand have reached the skull and the fingers of the other have reached the tailbone, your training partner should jump them back to the middle and slowly and strongly stretch out your spine again.



Try to make your spine follow the fingers' command. When you got the hang of it, lengthen your spine by yourself, without your partner's manual guidance.



## ***Pulling yourself down to the "hole"***

In the "Pulling yourself down to the bar" section of the deadlift chapter we showed you how to pull yourself down with your hip flexors, the muscles on the top of the thighs. You must do the same when you squat.

Lie on your back and place your hands in the small of your back to set a normal lumbar curve. Straighten out your legs, and place your feet on your training partner's knees, this time as wide as your squat stance. Dorsiflex your feet—pull your toes towards your nose. Your buddy will grab your insteps and give you some resistance. Pull your knees towards you without losing your SQ stance and without allowing your head or tail to come up. Feel the muscles on the top of your thigh creases. You must feel these muscles pull you down into the "hole" or bottom of the squat—any type of squat.





## Prying

Pull yourself to the bottom of your face-the-wall squat—just a little below parallel. Place your forearms inside your thighs to help push them apart. Another option: hold a forty-five pound plate against your chest.

Start rhythmically shifting your weight from one foot to the other—without coming up any higher. Imagine a ceiling an inch above your head.

As you are “skating” side to side in this manner, visualize that you are pulling your hips out of their sockets. At the same time visualize “widening your pelvis”. This will help you spread your sit bones apart. Believe it or not, your pelvis has two halves. They are supposed to move. If they do not, you cannot squat as deep and you are likely to have orthopaedic problems down the road. It is very likely that this drill will save you from a hip replacement surgery a few decades from now.

So pry your pelvis loose. You will be more mobile, stronger, and healthier. Remember to keep your spine long, occasionally shift your attention from the hips and pry your back to make it “longer.”



When you have reached the point where you are deep enough to have the tops of your knees above your hip creases with your knees tracking your toes, you are ready for the box squat drill, coming up shortly.



## To open your hips even more

Andrew Read, RKC Team Leader mentions that the stretch with you lying down with your legs up on the wall "works great for the adductors too—just open your legs up and allow gravity to slowly pull them down. Every now and then pry, push the feet out to the walls and allow them to drop more and wiggle hips closer to the wall." Keep your tail against the wall and maintain a lower back arch.



As this is a passive stretch, do it after lifting, not before.

Photos courtesy Dr.  
Michael Hartle,  
Senior RKC





## ***RKC hip flexor stretch***

In the “Pulling yourself down to the bar” section in the deadlift chapter you met your hip flexors, the muscles on the top of your thighs that bring your knees up. Surprisingly, stretching these muscles will improve the ease with which you hit the legal squat depth. It also strengthens your deadlift by removing the “brakes” for your glutes.

Assume the kneeling lunge position on a soft surface. Your hips must be square, your feet parallel rather in line. Imagine that you are wearing cross-country skis.

Your torso must be upright at all times—think “tall spine.” Plantar flex or point the foot of the back leg, although if this makes you cramp, you may dorsiflex it as shown on the photos.

If the back knee is “flopping” out, imagine that you are squeezing something between your knees. If we stay with the cross-country ski analogy, your back knee must touch the ski and not the ground outside the ski.



The shin of the front leg should be near vertical; you may have to step forward during the stretch as you are sinking lower and the knee is moving forward.

You may hold on to something on your side for balance; you may not lean forward on your knee. Better yet, press your palms into the small of your back.

Squeeze your glutes and push your pelvis forward. Your pelvis, not your chest! The hips must lead and most of your weight must stay on the rear knee!

“Pull both hips out of their sockets” and simultaneously lengthen your spine—but don’t hyperextend it.

I repeat: don’t overarch your spine and don’t turn your hips; this is false flexibility.







Relax and go back. Get into a rhythm of approximately one rep every two seconds.

The harder you tense the glutes, the easier it is on the back.

Repeat with the other leg.

Practice your hip flexor stretches between squat stretches.

# Stretching for strength athletes

Speaks Dr. Michael Hartle, Senior RKC:

"For strength athletes, including powerlifters, I ALWAYS give them the "Golden Three" stretches: the RKC hip flexor stretch, a good hamstring stretch (i.e. doorway hamstring stretch), and the 90-90 stretch. These three stretches will address most issues arising from the SQ and the DL. And hang from pullup bar after each training session to decompress the spine. Good for you!"



*This modified hurdler stretch is great for the hips and the lower back. It stretches the gluteus muscles (maximus, medius and minimus) and the various hip rotators.*

*Sit on the floor on your left hip. Place your left leg, bent at a right angle, in front of you and your right leg, bent at a right angle, to the side of you. The starting position will have right angles at both the right and left hip, knee and ankle with the left/front foot parallel to the right/back calf and the left/front calf parallel to the right/back thigh.*



*Place your right hand on your left ankle and your left hand, with the left arm rotated out, on the ground outside your left hip. Making a "proud chest" and hinging at the hips only (no rounding the spine!!), lean forward and press your buttocks away, keeping the sternum/chest over the knee. Hold the stretch for 20 seconds, making sure you relax and breathe deeply. Keep the neck and head in line with the torso. Repeat on the opposite leg.*

*Diagonally turning your upper body towards your left/front foot and repeating the directions above will give you an additional stretch for this area.*

*When performed properly, this stretch will be felt in the outside of the left/front hip.*



Photos courtesy Dr. Michael Hartle, Senior RKC



## *Find your perfect power squat stance*

Let Prof. Stuart McGill show you the way:

*In order to find the optimal hip width (or amount of standing hip external rotation), have the athlete adopt a four point kneeling stance. From neutral, rock or drop the buttocks back to the heels. Mark the angle at which spine flexion first occurs. Then repeat with varying amounts of space between the knees. Look for the optimal knee width that allows the buttocks to get closest to the ankles without any spine motion. This is the hip angle that will produce the deepest, and ultimately the highest performance squat. It is much wider than most people think. Observe the world champs squatting.*





## *Learn to descend like a pro with the box squat*

The box squat is just like sitting down on a chair. It has been around for forty years and many powerlifters swear by it for building squat power. However, medical professionals frown upon it because of the heavy spine compression. On the *Deadlift Dynamite* plan you will not be using the box to get strong; only to learn the proper power squat groove.

First let us revisit the hip-crease drill from the deadlift section. Stand up and place the edges of your hands into the creases on top of your thighs. Press your hands hard into your hinges and stick your butt out while keeping your weight on your heels. You should feel the muscles in your hinges, the hip flexors, tighten up as if you are doing sit-ups.

Hold a kettlebell or a large barbell plate against your chest. This load placement, suggested by Dan John, Master RKC, will quickly teach you to sit back, as leaning forward would make you lose your balance.



Stand a foot or so in front of a sturdy bench or box, facing away from it. The height of the box should be such that when seated, the tops of your knees will be slightly above your hip creases. Initially, you may use a taller box though.

Assume the stance you have found with Prof. McGill's guidance.

Force your chest open, pull your shoulders down using your lats, and look straight ahead.

***The height of the box should be such that when seated, the tops of your knees will be slightly above your hip creases.***



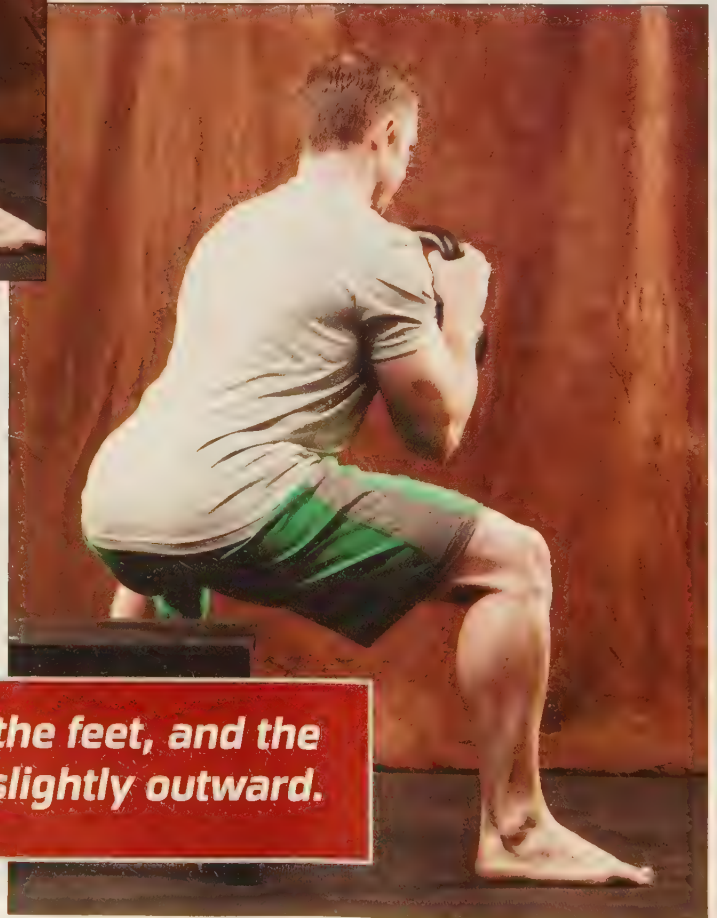
***Push your knees out  
and sit back.***

Push your knees out and sit back.

Keep pushing your rear end back. Your knees will bend, but only as an afterthought. Hips first!

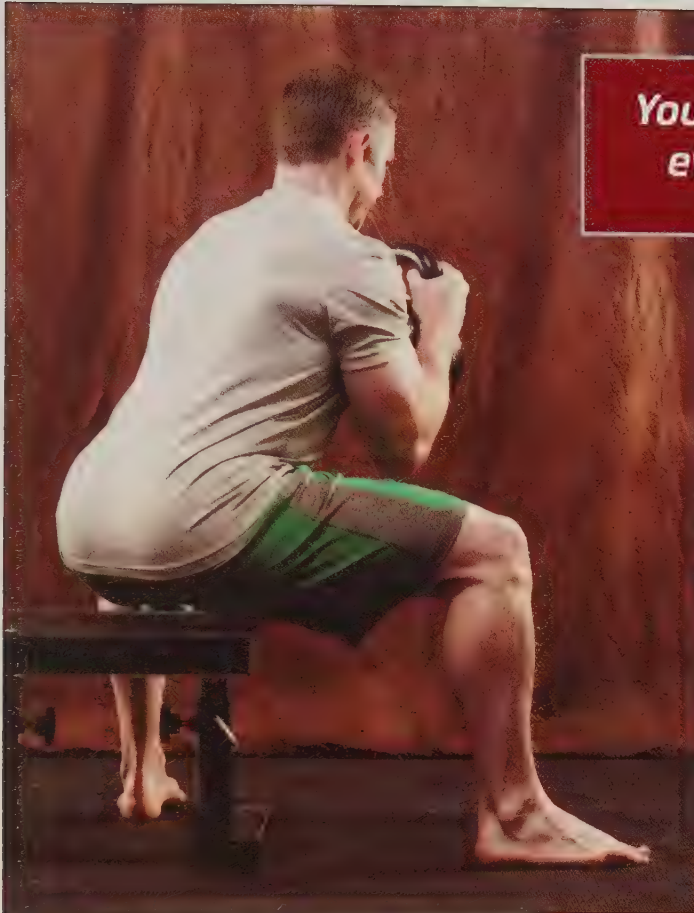
Don't let your knees go forward. Ideally, your shins should be close to vertical. Remember the 2x4s. Use them if you must.

Never let your knees bow in; strongly push them apart. The knees should track the feet, and the feet should be pointing slightly outward.



***The knees should track the feet, and the  
feet should be pointing slightly outward.***





***You must not fall  
even an inch!***

Keep sitting back until your back-side softly touches down on the box. You must not fall even an inch! Control your descent all the way. You will feel tightness on the top of your thighs, in your hip flexors, and a stretch in your hamstrings if you do it right. It is a skill to maintain the tightness in your hip creases all the way down.

Time to get up. Rock back. Instantly rock forward and stand up while observing the following rules.

First, do not move your feet. No funny business like crossing your ankles or tucking your feet underneath you! Remember that you are stuck in cement up to your knees.

***Remember that you  
are stuck in cement up  
to your knees.***





Second, fold over and reach forward. If you have set your feet far enough forward as instructed, trying to stand up while remaining upright is an exercise in futility, a challenge to the fundamental laws of physics. You will have to hinge forward far enough to bring the kettlebell or plate you are holding against your chest over your feet.

***Tense your glutes—"crush a walnut"—and drive your hips forward, as in the deadlift, until you stand up.***

The moment you feel your feet loaded, simultaneously arch your upper back into an imaginary barbell on your back and push your feet hard straight down into the ground. Tense your glutes—"crush a walnut"—and drive your hips forward, as in the deadlift, until you stand up. Keeping your shins vertical and forcing your knees out all this time.

When you have got the hang of the box squat, practice it facing a wall. Stand a little farther than you did in the face-the-wall squat, but close enough to discourage you from coming up with your tail first. If you do, your kisser will smash into the wall. A self-correcting exercise. Jack Reape, RKC does it with a bar on his back.

Finally, you are ready to approach the bar. Just remember that mobility is a perishable quality. Once you have reached the required levels, you will have to keep practicing the drills that got you there for the rest of your career to maintain it.



**AB**

Here is how to perform the powerlifting style squat. Work on these points and you will soon be squatting like a pro. If need be, film your lifts on a video camera in order to review your technique. Or get yourself a training partner who really knows what they are doing and ask for their feedback on your squats. Better still, use both approaches.

Whatever you do, do not follow the narcissistic bodybuilders by squatting in front of a mirror. This will only lead to a breakdown of your technique (the exact opposite of what you are trying to achieve). When you lift in front of a mirror you become over-reliant on what your eyes can see and you under-utilise your other senses. The bottom line is that if you want to be strong, just say 'no' to the mirror.

When squatting, the first thing you must do is find a suitable squat rack, power rack, mono-lift or pair of old-school squat stands. Any of these options will work, but bear in mind that if you are squatting alone you will be best off in the power rack because it is a lot safer (the one downside to the powerlifting style squat is that it is nearly impossible to dump the bar off your back if you get stapled at the bottom, so having a good spotter on your heavy sets is a very wise idea).

Once you have found a suitable place to squat you must set the bar up at the right height. A good starting point is to have the bar around your lower chest line when it is in the rack and you are stood up straight, with a hip width stance. You are now set and ready to start squatting.

## ***Unracking the bar***

Many people pay no attention to how they un-rack the bar and do so in a sloppy manner. What they fail to realise is that they are throwing away pounds off their squat by doing this and risking injury.

To un-rack the bar properly, take an even grip on the bar. Use a full grip (thumbs around the bar) and start out with your pinkie fingers on the power rings. You may need to go wider if you are a big guy or have tight shoulders, lacking in mobility.

Squeeze the bar hard.

Once your hands are set, it is time to place your feet. Your mid-foot should be directly under the bar and your chest will now be touching it.

Get your upper back as tight as possible by forcing your shoulders back and down and squeezing your shoulder blades together. Holding this position, bend your legs slightly, push your glutes to the rear, duck your head under the bar and set the bar on your back.

If you are new to squatting, finding a 'sweet-spot' for the bar to sit on your back will require some experimentation. For most lifters, somewhere around their rear delts works well. A high bar position does not really favour the powerlifting style squat. With that said, do not try to set the bar too low down your back, because this can lead to the bar moving as you squat and in the worst case scenario it could fall off.

Not what you want.

Bar position is like most things in life—a happy medium will work best. So experiment with the bar position until you find one you are happy with. From then on, use the same bar position on every set and every rep.

It pays to take your time when setting up under the bar. If you watch videos of the great powerlifter Ed Coan, you notice that he always took his time making sure the bar was sitting correctly before he un-racked it. Take note of Ed and follow in his footsteps.

Before you un-rack the bar, there are two more things to do. First, drive your head back into the bar. This helps keep your upper back tight and will result in you looking straight ahead or slightly up. Do not look down (unless you want the bar to roll over your head as you squat!).

Finally, take a big breath into your belly and get tight. You must brace your abs as if some big, tough, nasty dude was about to punch you in the stomach. If you are wearing a belt—brace your abs and push them out against the belt.

As well as bracing your abs, you must also flex your lats. Flexing your lats adds stiffness to your core, increasing tightness and helping to keep your shoulders back and down. More tightness equals more strength. By tensing your lats you are also protecting your spine. Very few strength athletes realize that this simple act of flexing their lats can have such a profound effect on their strength (and safety while lifting).

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**P**

Doc Hartle stresses: "Remember to pull down on the bar when racked on the shoulders and to not push up on it. Doing that will create many elbow issues usually seen in the bench press."

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**AB**

You are now set to un-rack the bar. It may sound like a lot of steps to get to this point, but once you have practised them for a few weeks; most of it will be done automatically, sub-consciously, without you having to think about it. And you can rest assured that your attention to detail will pay off for the months and years to come in your strength training career.

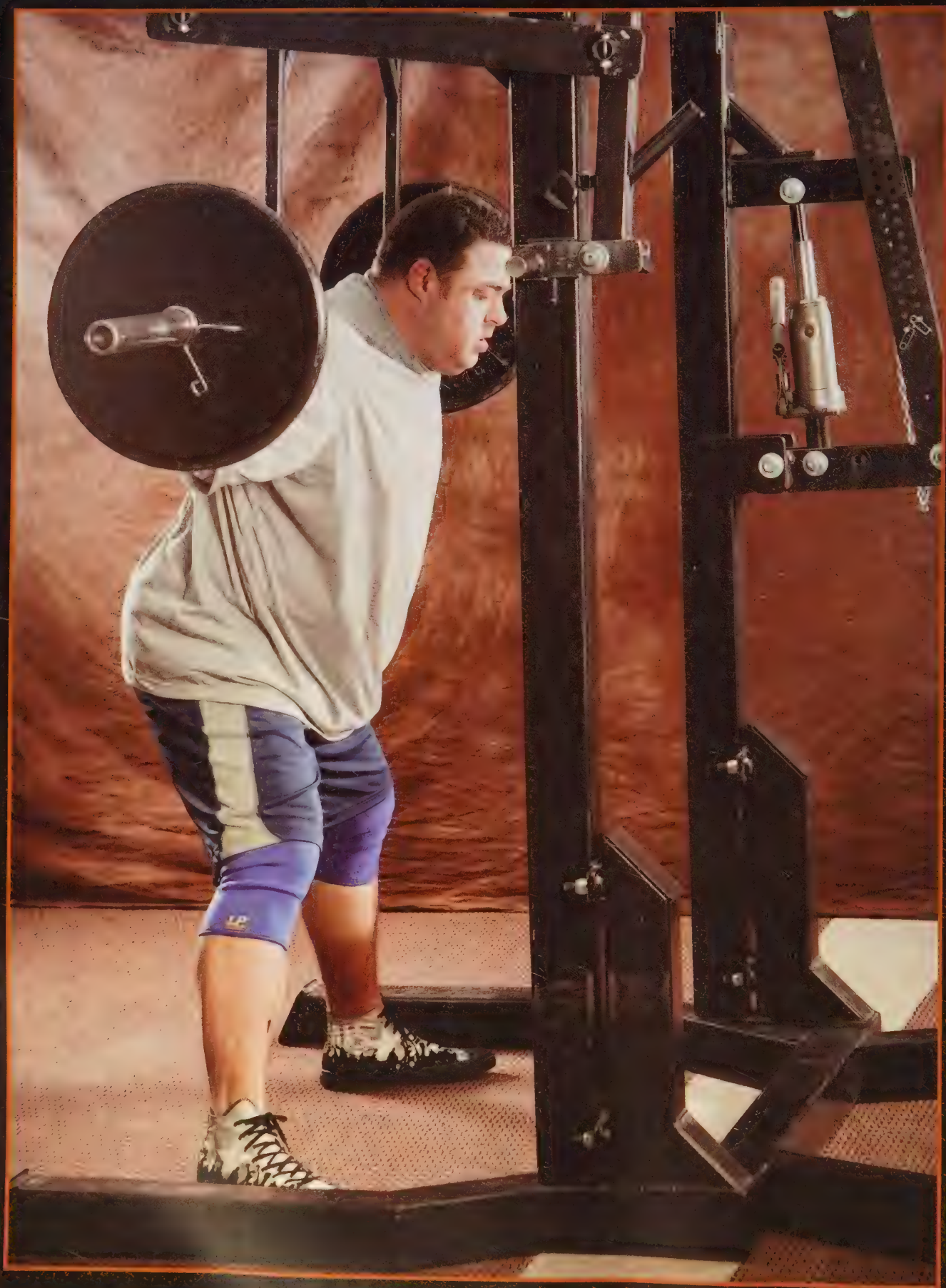
To un-rack the bar, 'arch' it out of the rack, keeping the same tightness that you created while setting up. Once you have stood up with the bar, take a short step back with your left foot and then do the same with your right foot.

Do not walk the bar any further out of the rack than you have to. A 4 to 6 inch walkout is perfect. Lifters who walk the bar out 4 feet are wasting their time and energy, not to mention increasing the risk involved with their squatting sessions. (If you need to rack the bar quickly, would you rather be 4 inches from the rack or 4 feet?)











Your feet should be placed shoulder width apart or slightly wider. Narrow stances do not suit the powerlifting style squat so avoid them. Your stance width will depend on your biomechanics and mobility. Do not go so wide that your knees fall inwards as you squat (more on this shortly).

You will want to point your toes out 15 to 45 degrees. Finding your best squatting stance will take some experimentation and trial and error. One thing to be aware of is that the more supportive equipment you are wearing (briefs and squat suit), the wider you can take your stance. If you are squatting raw, do not try and squat as wide as I do when I squat 1200lbs +, because when I do that I am wearing full multi-ply powerlifting equipment and that provides the hips with a lot of protection. If you try to squat too wide you will jack up your hips and you do not want that. So find the widest stance that you can comfortably handle.

## ***Taking the bar down***

You are now set and ready to squat.

Before you do so, take another breath into your belly. Breathe shallow as you do this, through pursed lips. Once you un-rack the bar you must maintain absolute tightness at all times, until you have finished your set of squats and racked the bar. This is necessary for maximum strength and safety and can only be done if you breathe shallow.

Begin your descent by forcing your knees out and 'sitting-back'. When you correctly force your knees out, you should feel your weight on the mid and rear of your feet and it should favour the outside of your feet. If your weight is on your toes and/or the inside of your feet, you will have major problems.

Once you have forced your knees out and created space for your hips to sit into, you must sit back. To do this, imagine sitting back into a chair, pushing your glutes to the rear. As you do this, your knees will naturally bend. (You do not have to think about them).







## A stronger way to "spread the floor"



You know that if you let your knees bow in in the squat, you could injure them. It makes sense even if you do not know anatomy. The shin, when viewed from the front, is no longer vertical. The load is no longer stacked along the bone and most of the weight is thrown to the inside of the knee. Obviously, the insides of the feet will be loaded more than the outsides.

The opposite situation, with the knees going out, the outsides of the feet getting overloaded and the insides getting unloaded can also be a problem. Not to the knees, but to the hips. Which is one of the reasons why many of the wide squatters who practice the "spread the floor" technique have tight and painful piriformis, TFL, and other muscles on the outside of the hip.

Think about it architecturally. In order not to overstress the tissues on the inside or the outside of the leg, you should load your foot 50/50 from inside to outside. In addition to getting rid of some aches and pains, you will be stronger. Your feet are covered with mechanoreceptors, little "buttons" that activate various muscles. If you let the outsides of the feet come up, the buttons responsible for turning on your hips will not be pressed. If you let the balls of your feet get unloaded, your quads will not be fully turned on. And if your big toes come up, some muscles within the hamstring and quad groups will not get the message.

The lesson is—modify the "spread the floor" technique in a manner that allows you to load your feet more evenly from side to side. You can do it only if you have learned to separate the two halves of your pelvis (remember the "Prying" section).

Stick your feet to the platform like suction cups and spread not only your knees, but also the tops of your thighs—right where your dress pants' side pockets would be. So "**spread the side pockets**". Quite subtle, but once you get a hang of it, it is a very powerful feeling.







**AB**

As you descend, stay tight, carry on looking forwards (or slightly up) and keep your chest up. Go down until the crease of your hip is just below the top of your knee (when your squat is viewed from the side). Your shins should be as close to vertical as possible and your torso will lean over at around a 25 to 45 degree angle to compensate for the fact that you sat back. If your torso did not lean over to compensate for the sitting back action, you would fall over, simple as that.

You cannot squat with an upright torso because it is impossible to hit powerlifting depth if you do. However, your lower back must stay arched at all times and by keeping your abs and upper back tight throughout each and every rep of your squats, you will be able to do this. Fail to stay tight and your lower back will round, making your squat weaker and exposing you to injury.

You should descend as quickly as you can, while keeping complete control of the bar. That last point is important, so pay attention to it.

Once you have hit depth, it is time to come back up...







**Once you have hit  
depth, it is time to  
come back up...**

## ***Driving the bar to lockout***

If you do everything perfectly in your squat up until the point where you are deep in the hole, you will more than likely find that you do not have to think too much about driving the bar back to lockout. Your body will instinctively know which line to take. However, there are some things you should be aware of...

- As you drive the bar out of the hole you must be aggressive and push as explosively as you can. Obey the *Law of Compensatory Acceleration* and push the bar as fast as possible, regardless of whether you have 50% of your max on the bar or 105%. (The exception to this rule is when warming up; do not be explosive with weights less than 40% of your 1 rep max because you risk hyperextending your joints at lockout if you do).

- Keep pushing your knees out. Do not allow them to cave inwards.
- Keep your chest up, upper back tight and keep looking straight ahead or slightly upwards
- Stay tight! Keep your abs braced and lats flexed as hard as you can.

Once you have successfully completed the rep, pause in the lockout position for a second or two, take a shallow breath, stay tight and either descend into your next rep or rack the bar. Only once the rack is taking the full weight of the bar do you have permission to relax.

There you have it. You now know exactly how to perform a perfect powerlifting squat. All you need to do is practice it over and over and over again...

## ***A few thoughts on squat technique***

The squat is, in many ways, no different to a golf swing or a backhand in tennis. You may think I have gone mad, but hear me out...

Compare and consider those three movements for a second or two: squat, golf swing and tennis backhand. There are some parallels believe it or not. For starters, all the movements start with a set-up. This is the foundation. Get it right and you put in place the correct environment for the rest of the movement to take place. Get it wrong and you will be making compensations throughout the movement pattern—that will never be as efficient as if you started correctly by getting your set-up right.

After the set-up, the squat has a descent and the golf swing and tennis backhand have a back-swing. You may think that that makes the squat totally different to the other two movements. But what if we changed the wording slightly and referred to those movement patterns as the 'loading phase'? In effect, that is exactly what those movements are.

In the squat descent you load your posterior chain ready for a huge push back to lockout on the ascent. In the golf back swing and tennis backhand the implement that the athlete uses to hit the ball (club and racket respectively) is drawn away from the target, ready to be launched back at it.

In all three movements the loading phase gets the athlete ready for a very violent phase that follows! If this 'loading phase' is done correctly, the next phase; where you drive the bar back to lockout in your squat (or the ball is hit, in the other two sporting movements) is easy.

The squat is like the golf swing and tennis backhand because it is a chain reaction. And you should start to view your training sessions as golf and tennis pros view theirs: as practice sessions.

When you start to practice your squats, instead of just mindlessly lifting the bar; you will develop mind-blowing technique very quickly. And above all else, great athletes tend to separate themselves from their amateur counterparts by having technique that is much better. In powerlifting



it is no different. I squat 1,214lbs but none of my teammates do. My technique is also better than all of theirs. Is that the only reason why I out-squat them? No, of course not; but it is a major factor.

And it doesn't matter whether you are a total beginner or an advanced lifter; your technique on your squat can probably be improved. Take the technical pointers in this chapter and start practicing them on each and every rep of the squat that you perform.

It generally takes a few hundred (approximately 500) reps to make a movement automatic, so that you can do it without thinking. However, it takes thousands of reps (approximately 3,000) to undo a faulty movement pattern and re-groove it. So the message is clear—do things right each and every time you practice and do not take any reps for granted; even your warm ups with just the bar.

## ***Troubleshooting your squat***

For grooving your squat technique, no matter what problems you are having; Pavel's 'Face the Wall Squat' will help you out. This movement can be performed as part of your warm up before you squat. If your technique is good, a set of 8 to 12 reps is all you need. However, if you are a rank beginner, or have realised that your technique is not good; a more aggressive approach is called for. Try this:

- 3 to 4 sets of 8 to 12 reps of 'Face the Wall Squats' before you squat
- 3 to 4 sets of 8 to 12 reps on your days off from squatting (these can be done at home)

It is very important to pay attention to how you perform these reps. Take your time, do them properly and rest at least a minute between sets. If you bang these reps out in any old fashion and pay no attention to your technique, your squat technique will not improve. Do them right and it will. Simple as that.

The 'Face the Wall Squat' should be your first choice for improving all aspects of your squat form. It will not hurt anybody and will help you out greatly if your powerlifting squat form currently sucks.

Here are some more ideas for fixing common squat problems:

- If your knees cave in as you squat, try this drill. Take a Jump Stretch mini-band and double it up (fold it in half). Then place the band around the bottom of your knee-caps. Now assume your normal squat stance and perform reps. What you will notice is that the band tries to pull your knees in—you must compensate by forcing them out. Try 2 to 3 sets of 5 to 8 reps on your days off from squatting (use only your bodyweight). You will soon keep your knees out while squatting, without thinking about it.



- If you are struggling to 'sit-back' on the descent of your squat, you need to get your hamstrings stronger. Add some glute ham raises, kettlebell swings and band leg curls to your routine (If you cannot do a single glute ham raise the first time you try them, you know your hammies need some work)







*Add some glute ham raises, kettlebell swings and band leg curls to your routine.*



- If you end up leaning over too much on the way out of the hole and your squat ends up looking like a good morning, add some front squats, Zercher squats or goblet squats to your routine for a few weeks. These squat movements are front loaded and therefore force you to keep your torso more upright and they work your core overtime.



***Zercher squats  
are front loaded  
and force you to  
keep your torso  
more upright and  
they work your  
core overtime.***





- Another option for curing leaning over too much on the way up on your squats, is to use the safety squat bar (SSB). This cleverly designed bar actually tries to pull you forwards and will force you to counter its evil pull by staying more upright. This works your upper back like crazy and will make squats with a regular power bar seem a lot easier (as an added bonus, many lifters find that a cycle with the SSB on their squats makes their deadlift jump up too).
- If you struggle to get your upper back really tight, take a mini or light Jump Stretch band and do some band pull-aparts in front of your chest. To do this hold the band in both hands, with your arms straight and parallel to the floor. Now, pull the band apart by pulling your arms out to the side. At this point you will feel great tightness in your upper back. Hold this position for a 2 count and repeat for reps. Try to re-create this feeling in your upper back when you squat.

## ***Ideas for beginners***

If you are new to squatting and your form is not yet up to scratch, do not even think about loading your squats with anything more than the bar. What you need is perfect practice. The old saying, “Practice makes perfect” is not true. Rather practice makes permanent. So you had better practice perfectly if you want to develop killer squat technique as quickly as possible.

Here is what to do:

- Start every session with 3 to 4 sets of ‘Face the Wall Squats’
- Squat the bar for 5 perfect reps in session 1. In session 2 do another set. Session 3, add a third set of 5 and so on. Keep going like this until you can hit 5 sets of 5 reps with perfect form (keep the reps to no more than 5 per set, because it is much easier to do 5 perfect reps than 10 or 15. Leave high reps for bodybuilders who do not mind training with sloppy form. Strength athletes need perfect form—and low reps rule in order to make sure that happens.
- Now you can add weight—a little at a time. Always jump in small increments, 1.25kg plates are your best friends; especially when learning a new movement.
- When you are first learning to squat like this, you can squat every day. This will speed up your learning process and you will be able to recover because the weight is not heavy enough to require several days off between sessions.





# Championship Technique: Tight, Fast, and Never to Failure

## *On avoiding failure in training*



hen strength training, failure can have two meanings.

Firstly, when you literally cannot lift the bar. For instance, if you take the bar down to your chest and cannot budge it an inch off your chest—that's it, you've failed.

Secondly, failure can mean the point at which your form breaks down during a set. This is usually called technical failure. An example of this would be when you are training your deadlifts and you pull 315lbs x 5 reps with picture perfect form.

However, you then go on to perform two more reps, but your form goes out the window and you look like a scared cat on reps 6 and 7. Here, technical failure occurred on rep 6.

I try to avoid failure of either kind when training because it is not necessary to fail in order to get stronger.

If you abide by the principle of always “leaving a rep in the tank,” you will not go far wrong.

If you avoid this advice and instead, train to failure, the following may become your reality:

- A worsening of your technique due to all of the poor reps you are now doing where you go past the point of technical failure.
- Overtraining... It is my observation that the guys I train with who regularly “fail” during training are the ones who have the most problems with recovery and need the most back-off weeks.
- Injuries... training to failure is dangerous and invites injury. Save absolute grinders for the meet and if you do not compete, or compete in another sport—avoid failure entirely when performing your strength training.

## ***On tightness***

There are many pieces of the puzzle that you must master, regardless of whether you are just starting strength training or trying to bring down established world records.

Believe me when I tell you that I have trained with many strong dudes, with many styles of lifting. I’ve seen explosive lifters and grinders. Guys who squat narrow and guys who squat wide. Conventional pullers and sumo pullers. Guys who arch and guys who pull rounded back style.

However, the strong guys all have one thing in common—they know how to GET TIGHT.

Without tightness, you cannot have strength.

All the best lifters get tighter than the average lifters. Simple as that.

The question is, how do you learn to get tight?

Here’s how...

The plank—forget 90 seconds holds and instead start squeezing from head to toe as hard as possible for 10 seconds.

Medicine ball throws to the abs—painful, but maybe the quickest way of all to learn how to “brace” the abs.

Finally, squeeze your fists, lats, and abs as hard as possible on everything you do. Every set, every rep, no matter what the weight or exercise. You must get tight.



**P** When I first arm-wrestled a professional, I got annihilated. Dave Bauer loaded his muscles with maximum tension, to the point of shaking, before we even gripped hands. On the “Go!” he flashed my arm to the table. When he hit me, it was too late for me to load. Wrist wrestling world champion, at 117 pounds soaking wet, Dave nevertheless dispatched much huskier amateurs than me with casual ease. Bauer’s mastery of the skill of getting tight in advance played a key role in his winning record.

According to Soviet research, isometrically tensing one’s muscles before a dynamic contraction can improve performance by up to 20%! All elite arm-wrestlers, weightlifters, powerlifters, strongmen, and gymnasts know this. Consciously or not, they are all masters of pre-tension. “I turn myself into a rubber band, I am ready to accept the weight and toss it back up,” famously quipped Ernie Frantz. “If the body is tight it can accept any shock”, clarified the powerlifting great who had instinctively taken the right track in his training and whose book, Ernie Frantz’s *Ten Commandments of Powerlifting*, had the rare honor of being translated into Russian. “If someone were to hit you in the stomach it might hurt, but not if you tensed your stomach muscles first...”

In other words, you need to practice maximally tensing your body before you unrack a heavy squat, squeeze off a heavy pull, or perform any other manly effort. All the top guys are already doing it. The following three self-correcting drills will help you acquire their pre-tension skill quicker—and teach you to stay tight for the duration of the lift.

## ***Bottom-up kettlebell clean and press***

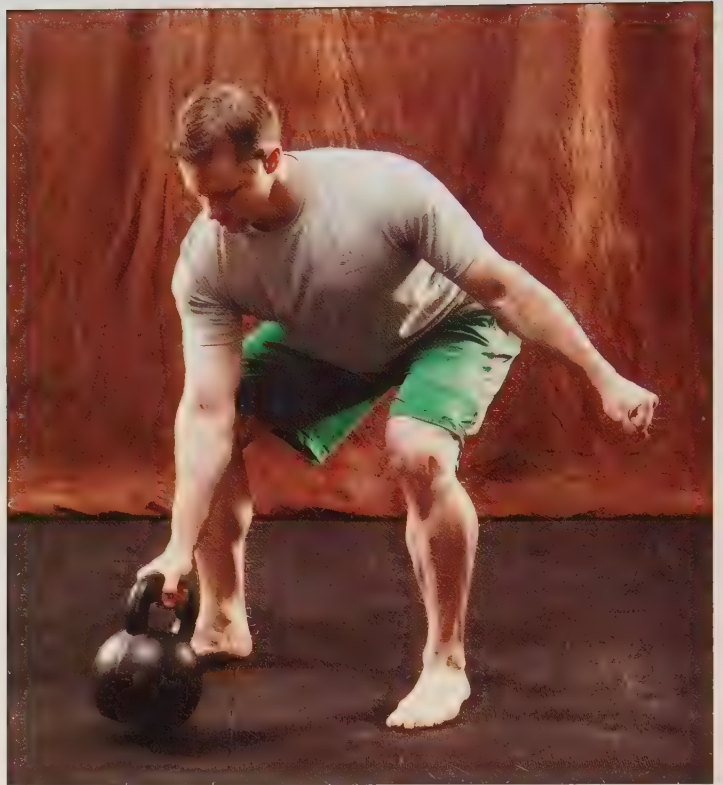
Chalk up your palm. Park a kettlebell on the deck a foot or so in front of you, the handle perpendicular to your shoulders. Place your feet as you did for sumo kettlebell deadlifts.

Lean on the kettlebell driving the handle deep into the webbing between your thumb and your fingers. The handle should be parallel to your calluses. Reach your fingers as far around the handle as possible and crush the handle as you take a breath.



***The handle should be parallel to your calluses.***

Shift your weight back to your heels tilting the kettlebell towards you.



Swing a kettlebell back between your legs and then in front of you, keeping your back flat. The action is identical to the kettlebell swing described in the second part of this book.

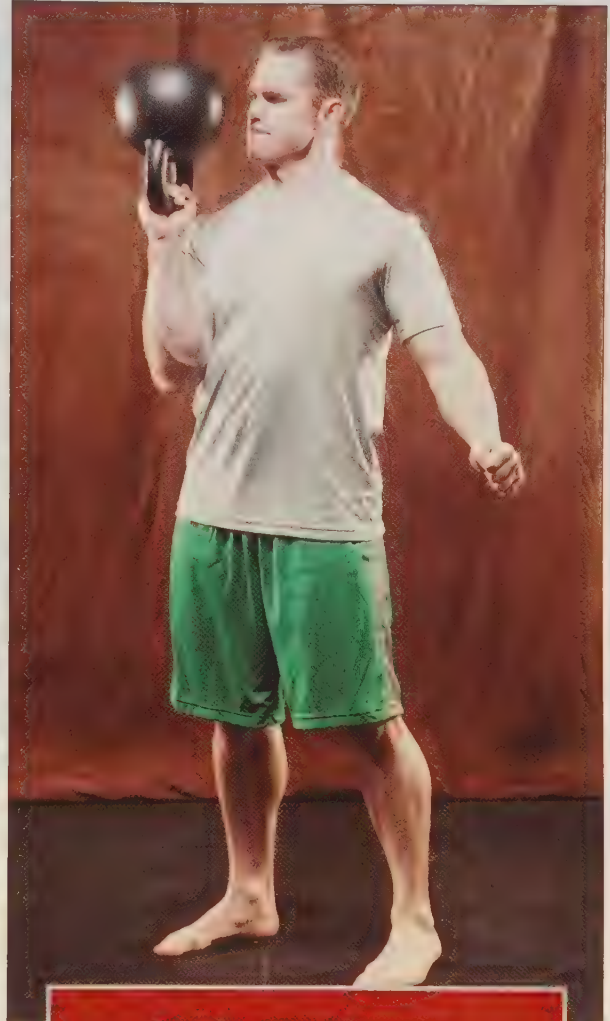




"Tame the arc," bringing the bell closer towards you. Explosively. Lock your knees, cramp your glutes, and freeze, holding the kettlebell bottom up as shown.



***"Tame the arc,"  
bringing the bell  
closer towards you.  
Explosively.***



***Lock your knees,  
cramp your glutes, and  
freeze, holding the  
kettlebell bottom up.***

Keep your triceps pressed against your ribs and flare your lat to provide a solid platform. It may take some time to figure out. You will have to crush the handle to pulp and keep your whole body tensed like a statue.

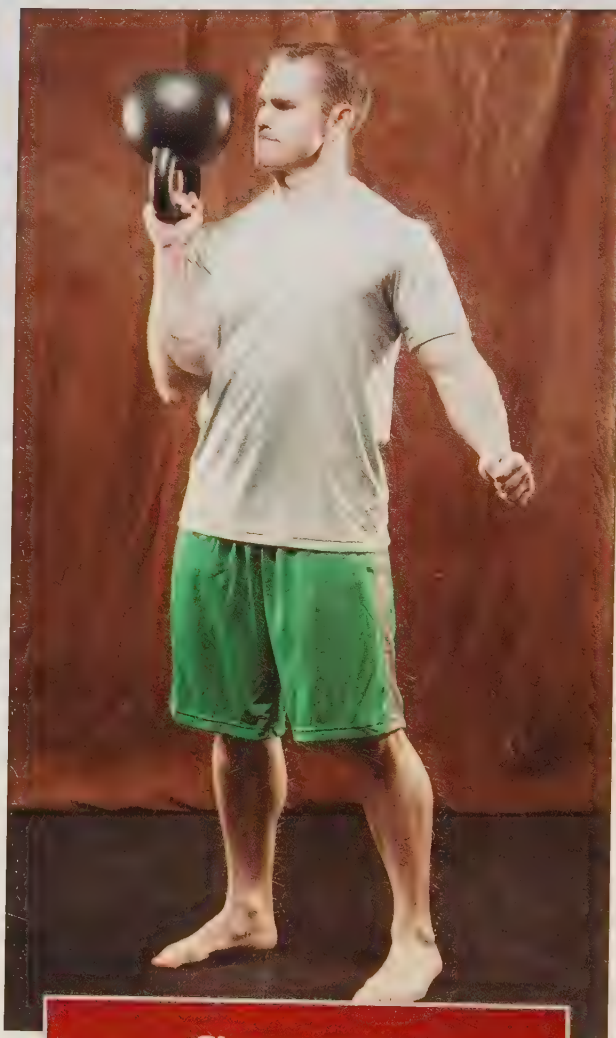
Be ready to get out of the way of the falling kettlebell; don't try to rescue a rep that has gone bad!

Pause motionless for a second or so. Balance the kettlebell in place by using proper alignment (elbow under the bell) and a crush grip, as opposed to moving around like a circus clown.

Suddenly go loose and drop the kettlebell back between your legs. Clean again.



***Suddenly go loose  
and drop the  
kettlebell back  
between your legs.***



***Clean again.***

Tight-loose-tight-loose. Fully relax the muscles surrounding your elbow when the bell is going up or down; tense every muscle on the very top. Do not do more than a few reps per workout as this exercise can be hard on the elbow if you do not relax your biceps when the bell is in motion. Patience.

Once you have got the bottom-up clean dialed in, work on pressing the kettlebell. To do so, you will have to learn to keep your forearm vertical and use your lat—advanced strength skills that will transfer to your bench press. Speaks Mark Reifkind, Master RKC, former coach Women's IPF Powerlifting Team USA:



*I've been doing a lot of bottoms up cleans and presses, on separate training days. One of the things I've noticed is the incredible similarity between the muscles involved, the body positions required, and their firing sequence in the bottom-up press and the bench press.*

*First, the forearm HAS to be perpendicular to the floor in the bottom-up press to even stabilize the weight. Same as the bench. Second, the grip has to be very tight and the weight on the heel of the hand. Ditto for the bench. Third, and perhaps most important and similar is that the lat has to be heavily involved in the bottom stabilization position in both exercises. The triceps has to be literally lying on it. Forth, the lat HAS to fire first to initiate the pressing for both moves. And fifth, the shoulders have to stay in the socket for any kind of strength to be available. Same for the bench.*

*The lat also has to stay involved throughout the whole press or the elbows swing out and the press and the bench is lost. AND, more importantly, the shoulder is severely destabilized. This is when rotator cuff injuries occur when pressing.*



**The forearm HAS to be perpendicular to the floor in the bottom-up press to even stabilize the weight.**

*I had stopped regular kettlebell presses as I couldn't stabilize with my lat well on my weird right side. I subbed the bottom-up press for the lat stabilization effect and wow, what a difference!*

*...Trained my powerlifting partner on this today and he really got the connection to his bench. The lats are the thing. Plus, you have to stay totally tight throughout the entire movement or it falls apart in a second. Good stuff.*

**The lat has to be heavily involved in the bottom stabilization position.**





For your information, George Halbert and Donnie Thompson have done bottom up kettlebell presses to up their enormous benches.

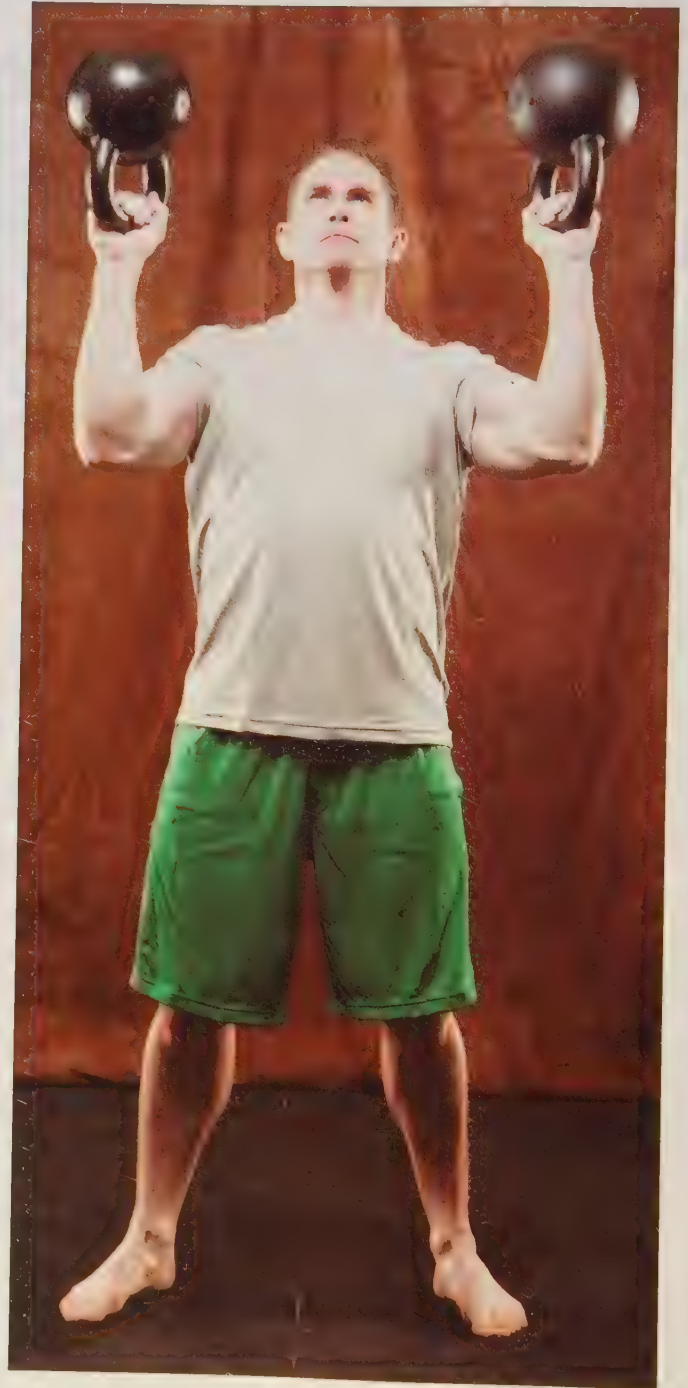
You need to keep your glutes very tight to protect your back when bottom up pressing.

Keep your knees locked and abs tight—there is no other way to bottom up press anyway.

One side is bound to be weaker. Work hard to bring it up. Gray Cook, RKC and Brett Jones, Master RKC have taught us that fixing the asymmetry in bottom-up kettlebell drills' performance brings great gains in strength and resilience.



Once you have nearly equalized your left and right, nailed the technique, and perfected your kettlebell swings, consider adding double BUPs. They can get hairy; have a bailout plan.







## **Bottom-up kettlebell carry**

This exercise will help to make your heavy squat walkouts safer and stronger. Speaks Prof. Stuart McGill:

*Every time I work with top international athletes I learn more about athleticism. We have all heard that having a strong core increases strength elsewhere in the body. Experience tells us this is true but I was incomplete in my explanation of the mechanism. I enhanced my education a couple of years ago following my analysis of "strongman event" competitors.*

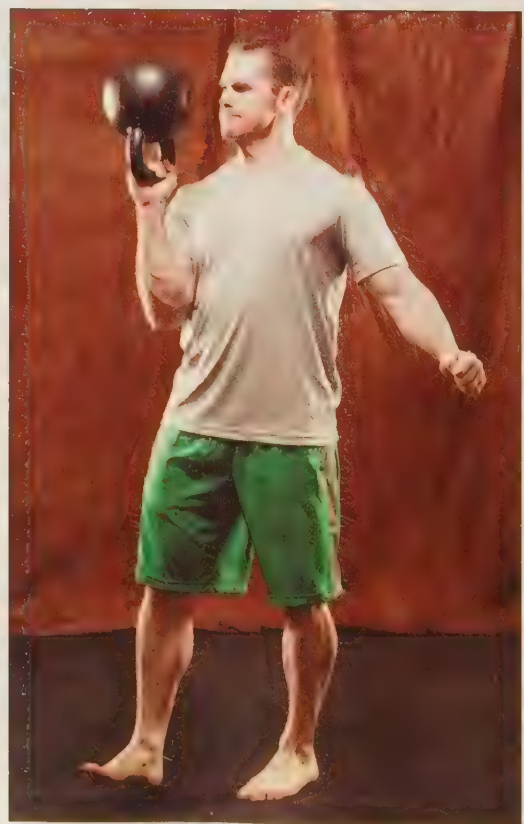
*First we measured the athlete's strength capabilities—hip abduction being one of them. Then we quantified the tasks, strength demands and joint mechanics in various events. Curiously they needed more hip abduction strength to succeed in events such as Super Yoke and the Suitcase Carry than they could create in their hips. How could they perform a feat of strength that was beyond what a joint could produce?*

*Consider the Super Yoke where several hundred pounds are carried across the shoulders. The axial load down the spine traverses across the pelvis to the support leg allowing the other leg to step and swing. Hip abduction is needed to lift the pelvis laterally, but clearly the strength required far exceeded what the hip could create.*

The missing strength came from the core muscles (quadratus lumborum and the abdominal obliques on the swing leg side) which helped lift the pelvis. Now consider the footballer who plants the foot on a quick cut. A strong and stiff core assists the hip power to be transmitted up the body linkage with no energy losses resulting in a faster cut. This is the same performance enhancing mechanism as the Super Yoke but it is not traditionally trained in the weight room.

This experience resulted in the search for the best training approach. We quantified asymmetric carries such as the suitcase carry and found that quadratus and the abdominal wall were challenged to create this unique but essential athleticism. However, working with Pavel we tried kettlebell carries (just in one hand). Racked traditionally with the bell carried on the back of the forearm (with the hand position tucked in close to the chest as if the athlete were to begin an overhead press) helps to reduce shoulder impingement, should this be an orthopaedic issue. However, even better was the bottom up carry. Here the bell is held upside down in the bottom up position with the elbow tucked close to the body and the bell beside the head. The core is stiffened to control the bell and prevent it from rotating in the hand. Now walk briskly. Core stiffness is essential to prevent the loss of the bell position.

I consider that every general program to enhance athleticism needs a carry task. The bottom up kettlebell carry is a staple. This and other techniques for performance enhancement are found in **Ultimate Back Fitness and Performance** ([www.backfitpro.com](http://www.backfitpro.com)).





## *Bottom-up kettlebell front power squat*



Clean a kettlebell bottom up (you need to have this skill down by now) from your power squat stance, and squat.

Be ready to bail. If the kettlebell starts falling, toss it away from you. It is easy to get hurt trying to save a rep gone bad, so don't.

As in the C&P, aggressively attack the asymmetry between the two sides of your body, then go for doubles.



## ***My thoughts on speed and compensatory acceleration***

**AB**

I am an explosive lifter. Always have been and always will be.

When I was younger and weighed 17 stones/238 pounds (instead of 26 stones/365 pounds like I do now), I ran 100 metres in 11 seconds. Pretty fast for a big dude.

With that said, I favor explosive lifting for all lifters and like the idea of compensatory acceleration training (CAT).

Before I talk about speed and lifting explosively, a word of warning again: never lift explosively until you have at least 40% of your max on the bar. This will minimize the chances of you hyper-extending any of your joints at lockout.

Warning over, let's progress...

CAT simply means that you will accelerate the bar as quickly as possible on the concentric motion of your lifts. It doesn't matter whether you have 50% or 105% of your max on the bar—you drive that bar as fast as you can.

Sure, the bar will not move quickly with a near maximal weight, but you must try. As Louie Simmons says, you cannot move a heavy weight slowly.

I feel that lifting explosively on all your sets has several benefits over trying to grind your weights up slowly:

- It teaches aggression.
- It develops speed (naturally fast lifters get faster and grinders get quicker too).
- Speed can help you blast through sticking points as if they weren't there.

In case you are wondering, on the eccentric phase (lowering phase) of a lift, I believe you should lower the bar as quickly as possible, while maintaining control. You must maintain control, unless you want broken ribs on the bench press and squats that go down but don't even get an inch out of the hole.

While lifting with as much speed as possible, there are two important rules:

### **1. You maintain your form.**

Bar path must be identical on 50% and 100% of your max. I have seen lifters move 60% of their max with very impressive speed but their max does not go up for years. The reason why is obvious, but they are too stupid to see it—they are lifting their speed weights through a different path to their max weights.



This is especially true on the deadlift. Keep your form tight.

## 2. You must stay tight.

There can be a temptation to lose tightness with lighter weights in an effort to move quicker, but you must stay tight.

Remember: abs, lats and fists of steel on everything you do in the weight room.

It has correctly been said recently that the easiest way to improve a beginner or intermediate athlete in any sport is to raise their absolute strength. I agree, because when strength goes up, many other attributes tend to follow.

However, if we look at sports, what tends to separate the elite from the merely good is SPEED.

In boxing and MMA, speed kills (nearly literally).

In middle distance running it is very often the guy with the sprint finish who prevails.

In tennis, a fast serve is a mighty weapon.

In soccer, fast forwards are a nightmare for defenders.

The most dominant golfer of all time is an awesome athlete who swings his clubs fast—Tiger Woods.

I could go on but the case is clear.

Generally speaking, speed wins the day in all sports. (Please note, I respect darts, chess, snooker and the like, but I do not call their competitors athletes and I do not consider such pursuits as sports. I consider them games and not worse than sports, just different.)

The strength world has its fair share of grinders (slower lifters), but if you are unsure whether or not fast lifters do well, consider this list of names and think about how dominant they have been and how fast they lift: Andy Bolton, Mariusz Pudzianowski, any weightlifter (it's impossible to be slow in weightlifting), Andrey Belyaev.

Ultimately, the choice is yours. Grinding can work, but I favor lifting as fast as possible. And if you compete in sport and use your weight training to improve your performance in that sport—you should lift how you expect to play... and the best play fast. Every time, in every sport.

One final point of consideration. I have no science to back this up, but my instinct tells me that fast lifters may put less strain on their muscles and joints than 'grinders'. Think about it. When I pulled 1,008lbs, I had to generate in excess of 1,008lbs—that is a lot of strain on the body. Would I rather that strain lasted 4 seconds or 15? I'll leave you to draw your own conclusions on that point.

**P**

We must stress that speed must never come at the expense of tension.

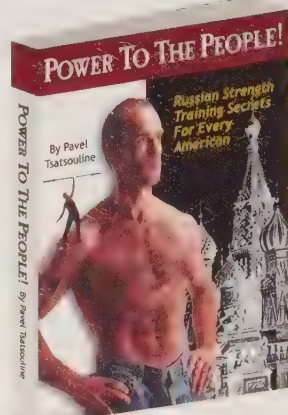
Moving a 50% weight fast does not demand high tension. Unfortunately, if you do not focus on staying tight, you will only get good at moving light weights fast (a quality Russian scientists call “high speed strength”)—and fail to see any improvement in your max. Because you are practicing a totally different skill.

Hence learn to get tight before trying to get fast.

Former Senior RKC Rob Lawrence made an insightful observation:

*The trick is to move as quickly as possible without sacrificing the level of tension necessary to sustain the load. If you want to whip your arm out in front of you, it should be as loose as possible; but if you want to push up a bench press, the speed will necessarily be limited by the amount of tension you need to maintain to support the barbell.*

*Beginners should emphasize tension first! If you try to teach speed right off the bat, the trainee will confuse “moving fast” with “making jerky movements”. Two different things. That is why [Pavel’s book] **Power to the People!** emphasizes tension above all. Once you have the requisite base of tension, that’s when you start trying to ramp up the speed.*





# How to Eat for Strength and Muscular Size



In this section I am going to talk about the weakness that is holding back not only lifters, but the entire Western world!

Let me tell you the cold harsh truth right now: without your health, you are nothing. Seriously, without health, nothing else matters.

So why is it, when we go to powerlifting meets I see lifters stuffing their faces with white bread, cheap cheese and ham sandwiches or chocolate bars?

Why are heart disease and cancer gripping the world in a horrible way? (I think 80% of us are statistically going to succumb to one of these diseases at some point.)

Why is it that I see guys training for 3 hours (with great technique and the “best” training programs)... but they don’t drink anything during that session?!

In other words... they are dehydrated while training!

I have been guilty of neglecting my nutrition in the past, but it is now something I take very seriously.

I’d like to share a few principles with you in this section that will improve your strength and your health.

# ***10 Principles for improved strength and health***

## **1. Get hydrated**

Drink at least 2 liters of water (excluding peri-workout nutrition per day). The bigger and/or more active you are, the more water you will need.

Try adding a pinch of Celtic sea salt or pink Himalayan rock salt to every liter of water you drink. This little secret will vastly improve your hydration levels.

Better hydration = better performance. Period.

## **2. Peri-workout nutrition rules**

It is amazing how many lifters still drink nothing around training time. To ignore peri-workout nutrition is foolish.

And for those coaches still recommending Skittles and Mars bars post workout— shame on them.

Get with the times.

Here is what a proper athlete drinks to fuel himself before, during, and after training...

- 1 hour before: 1/2 liter water, BCAAs, carbs
- During training: 1/2 liter water, BCAAs, carbs
- Immediately post workout: protein, carbs

Pretty simple really, isn't it? Start doing it and your strength will rapidly increase. Guaranteed.

## **3. Get your 5 a day (minimum)**

Okay, this one isn't sexy, but it's vital for your health. So just man up and do it. Eat 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day. Minimum.

5 of each would be better!

Emphasize variety and a wide selection of colors throughout the week. So don't just do bananas and potatoes (all yellow)... do bananas, strawberries, spinach, cherries, oranges and so on.

Get it?



## 4. Quality matters

Unfortunately, food quality is not always good these days—so get the best quality that you can afford.

Don't drink tap water—go for bottled water (or filtered).

Go organic whenever you can—this way you get less chemicals and other crap, and more vitamins and minerals. It's a 'no-brainer'.

You get the idea. Organic is really important.

## 5. Eat a variety of protein

Grass fed beef

Organic chicken

Wild Alaskan salmon

Don't eat chicken 8 times a day like some bodybuilders do—it's a recipe for boredom and the lack of variety is not healthy.

With meats in particular, **quality is super important**, hence the “grass fed”, “wild Alaskan”, “organic” etc.

## 6. Eat plenty of healthy oils

Have 2-4 dessert spoons a day of the following:

— Coconut oil

— Extra virgin olive oil

Have 2 to 4 teaspoons a day of this:

— Fish oil

## 7. Choose healthy carbs

White bread, bagels, sweets, cakes and white pasta are out!

Brown rice, spelt pasta and sprouted bread is in. Make the change and feel the difference.

## **8. Have a large, raw salad every day**

This is very important.

Here's how to do it:

Have this salad with fish, chicken or meat...

- Green leaves (spinach, lettuce etc)
- Tomato
- Cucumber
- 2 to 3 vegetables of your choice
- Olive oil, lemon juice

When we cook our food we destroy the enzymes and some of the vitamins and minerals. One raw salad a day will help you to get plenty of enzymes, vitamins and minerals into your body—all of which are vital for your health.

## **9. Get some sun or take some vitamin D**

Less than optimal vitamin D levels have been linked to many diseases. Unless you work outside in the sun, shirtless, for at least an hour a day, you are probably deficient in vitamin D.

Buy a vitamin D supplement and take it daily. Go for vitamin D3 and get at least 1,000IUs per day.

## **10. Get some maca powder**

This supplement is a great natural enhancer of testosterone.

So it's great for your strength and your performance in the bedroom. Have 1 dessert spoon a day minimum (add it to a shake or smoothie).

What I've just shared with you is very powerful. Get your nutrition right and your strength will fly through the roof.

My challenge to you is to step up and cut out the tinned, packaged, processed crap, and start putting good food into your body. Your squat, bench, deadlift and health will thank you for it.



# Cycling: A Simple and Highly Effective Way to Add Pounds to Your Pull



here are many ways to get stronger.

In fact, if you spent the next week researching different training methods on the Internet, you could find dozens of approaches that would work. True, some of these training methods would be better than others; but the point is, you have lots of options.

The trouble is, most lifters have too many options and these options actually stop them from being purposeful and using their time wisely in the gym. Instead of choosing one program and focusing on using it, and really getting to understand it, (so that they can reap the maximum possible strength gains from it), they jump from one program to another; never sticking to any one training methodology for more than a few weeks.

Needless to say, these trainees end up frustrated and bemused by their lack of progress. In this chapter, you are going to discover a simple and highly effective way to add pounds to your deadlift (and squat, bench and military press if you care for those lifts too). The training method you are going to learn about here is called: Cycling.

Cycling is not fancy, it is not “cutting edge,” it does not require an advanced degree in mathematics to understand—and this is the beauty of it. By the end of reading this chapter you will understand all you need to know about one of the most effective ways of training known to man.

And make no mistake, cycling has been the choice of training protocol for some of the most successful powerlifters and strength athletes of all-time. I myself used a cycling approach to squat 1,214lbs and deadlift over a grand. Ed Coan, probably the best powerlifter of all time, pound for pound, favored cycling too. So it does not matter what your bodyweight, or what level of strength you currently possess; you can use cycling to get stronger.

Turn off your mobile phone, shut down Facebook and pay attention as we get into the details...

## ***What exactly is cycling?***

Cycling is a way of structuring your training program.

For any given training cycle that you perform that uses the cycling approach, you will start out lifting moderate weights and finish lifting heavy weights (hopefully personal bests).

To understand how this works, check out these examples:

Lifter A has a 5 rep max (RM) in the deadlift of 225lbs. His goal is simple—increase that 5RM.

Here is how he could do it, using a simple 6 week power cycle:

Week 1: 185lbs x 5

Week 2: 195lbs x 5

Week 3: 205lbs x 5

Week 4: 215lbs x 5

Week 5: 225lbs x 5

Week 6: 235lbs x 5 (end with a solid 10lbs PR)

As you can see, there is nothing complicated or fancy about this cycle—but it gets the job done.

Week 1 starts out with a relatively modest 185lbs x 5. Then each week ‘Lifter A’ adds 10lbs and works up to a 10lb personal best in week 6 of 235lbs. This method of training stops you from burning out, due to the easy start to the cycle. You should also note that the weights are not so light at the start of the cycle that you lose strength.

Also be aware that several warm up sets need to be performed before your top set. For instance, on week 5, ‘Lifter A’s’ deadlift session could look like this:

Set 1: 135lbs x 5

Set 2: 135lbs x 5

Set 3: 185lbs x 3

Set 4: 225lbs x 1

Then progress to the working set:

Set 5: 235lbs x 5



You now understand how the cycling approach works. Here are the key points that you must remember:

- Start your cycle with moderate weights.
- Take sensible jumps from session to session (anywhere from 5 to 50 pounds can work, depending on your strength level).
- Aim to finish the cycle by peaking with a personal best.
- Once you have peaked, start over with moderate weights again and aim to cycle back up to a new personal best.

## ***Tried and tested cycling variations***

The above example is very simple and gives you a basic understanding of how cycling works. In the following section, you will see that cycling is incredibly versatile and can be adapted to suit your needs, no matter what your current strength level.

## ***Cycling for novices***

If you are a novice to the iron game and wish to advance your strength on the deadlift as rapidly as possible, take full advantage of the fact that you do not need to be very technical with your training program.

Here is a great way to take full advantage of ‘newbie gains’ using cycling. For arguments sake, let’s assume that you have just got your deadlift form nailed and you can pull 135lbs for 5 reps. The easiest way for you to progress is to simply add 5 pounds to the bar every time you train. Simple as can be—and it’ll work. Here’s how it looks:

Session 1: 135lbs x 5 reps

Session 2: 140lbs x 5 reps

Session 3: 145lbs x 5 reps

Session 4: 150lbs x 5 reps

Session 5: 155lbs x 5 reps

Session 6: 160lbs x 5 reps

And so on. You get the idea.

Hardly rocket science, but devastatingly effective for the novice because it has the consistency that is required to make strength gains. Stay with this kind of simplicity as long as you can. You could pull once a week, twice or possibly even three times a week. Whichever option you choose, remember that slow and steady always wins the race.

The iron game is a marathon and not a sprint.

If you are a novice, take 5 to 10 pound jumps from session to session and not a pound more. If you ignore this advice, your injury risk will rise and you will plateau much faster than with a more conservative approach. Imagine the potential outcome of this cycling approach. You start out on week 1 by deadlifting 135lbs x 5 reps and let's say that you take a very moderate approach and only deadlift once a week and you choose to add only 5 pounds each time you pull...

By week 10, you deadlift 185lbs x 5, carry on and by week 20, you are up to a respectable 235lbs x 5 and so on. After going to the gym for 20 weeks, most gym rats still don't know what a deadlift is!

No matter how good the cycling approach is, sooner or later you will stall. For instance, on week 21, when you should hit 240lbs x 5, you may train and only manage 240lbs x 3. Clearly, it is time to reduce your poundages for a few weeks and work back up again.

At this stage, you are ready for a more structured approach to your cycling...

## ***Cycling for intermediate and advanced lifters***

By the time you get to an intermediate level of strength, you should have a decent idea of what works for you and what doesn't. Here are some variables to think about when planning your training cycles:

The length of your training cycle—you can use anywhere from 4 to 12 weeks.

The jumps you take from week to week—the stronger you are, the bigger the jumps you can take. Some lifters prefer to start out much lighter at the start of their cycles and take bigger jumps, while others prefer to start a bit heavier, keep the intensity up throughout the cycle and take smaller jumps from session to session. Either way, your goal must be to finish the cycle stronger than you started it.

One top set or two? There is nothing to stop you planning training cycles that involve you working up to two sets of your top weight instead of just one. Experiment and see which works best for you. (Be aware that you can and should vary things from cycle to cycle).

How many reps to use. If you are new to strength training (and wish to gain some muscle too), it is hard to beat sets of 5. However, as you get more advanced, heavy triples, doubles, and singles may become extremely useful in order to keep your strength gains coming. If you decide to compete in powerlifting, these low reps will become essential in your training.



Regular linear cycles, wave cycles or step cycles. You do not have to take the same jumps from week to week and session to session. Wave and step cycles allow you to build easier and harder sessions into your training cycles. This can be helpful from both a physiological and psychological perspective.

How many times a week you train—are you going to train your deadlift 1, 2 or even 3 times per week?

Let's take a look at some different variations of cycling that you can use to build your strength on your deadlift, squat and bench...

Here is an example of a regular 6 week power cycle for a lifter with a 5RM of 315lbs on the deadlift:

Week 1: 275lbs x 5  
 Week 2: 285lbs x 5  
 Week 3: 295lbs x 5  
 Week 4: 305lbs x 5  
 Week 5: 315lbs x 5  
 Week 6: 325lbs x 5 (a nice 10lbs PR)

After this cycle, the lifter can start over again; this time using bigger jumps from week to week. This approach looks like this:

Week 1: 225lbs x 5  
 Week 2: 245lbs x 5  
 Week 3: 265lbs x 5  
 Week 4: 285lbs x 5  
 Week 5: 305lbs x 5  
 Week 6: 335lbs x 5 (another 10lbs PR)

At the end of this 6 week cycle, the lifter has two options. He can either drop the weight back down again and aim to work back up to another 5RM or he can keep going, if the weight on week 6 did not feel too hard.

Here's how the latter option would look:

Week 7: 355lbs x 5 (another PR)  
 Week 8: 375lbs x 2 (another PR but not the desired number of reps)

At this point, it is time for the lifter to start a new cycle.

You may also like to experiment with shorter, more aggressive cycles or longer, more drawn out cycles. Here are examples of both approaches, based on a lifter with a best 5RM in the deadlift of 365lbs...

## ***An example of how to use 4 week power cycles:***

Week 1: 310lbs x 5

Week 2: 330lbs x 5

Week 3: 350lbs x 5

Week 4: 370lbs x 5 (a solid 5 pound PR)

Start the next cycle, aiming to finish with 375lbs x 5

Week 1: 315lbs x 5

Week 2: 335lbs x 5

Week 3: 355lbs x 5

Week 4: 375lbs x 5 (another 5 pound PR)

## ***An example of how to use 12 week power cycles:***

Week 1: 275lbs x 5

Week 2: 285lbs x 5

Week 3: 295lbs x 5

Week 4: 305lbs x 5

Week 5: 315lbs x 5

Week 6: 325lbs x 5

Week 7: 335lbs x 5

Week 8: 345lbs x 5

Week 9: 355lbs x 5

Week 10: 365lbs x 5

Week 11: 375lbs x 5

Week 12: 385lbs x 5 (a 20 pound PR)

At the end of this cycle, the lifter starts over again—this time 10 pounds heavier, aiming to finish with 395lbs x 5 at the end of the 12 week cycle.

Unless you are training for a specific competition, you always have the option to extend your power cycle if you are feeling great. For instance, if you plan a 12 week cycle and smoke your PR set on the 12th week, keep going until you feel you can no longer progress. Only at this point should you back down and start another cycle.

The better you get, the more intuitive you can be when it comes to knowing when to extend your cycles. In contrast, occasionally you may be too ambitious with a cycle (or life may get in the way and interrupt your sleep and nutrition patterns)—whatever the case, you know you are not going to make your target for the end of the training cycle. If this is the case, there is no shame in backing down, taking a week off to re-charge your batteries and then starting a new cycle. We will show you how to do it later, in the section about fixing a failing cycle.



Next up, wave cycles...

Wave cycles are a little more complicated than regular linear cycles, but can be very effective. Here is an example for a lifter with a 5RM of 315lbs...

Week 1: 285lbs x 5  
 Week 2: 295lbs x 5  
 Week 3: 305lbs x 5  
 Week 4: 295lbs x 5  
 Week 5: 305lbs x 5  
 Week 6: 315lbs x 5  
 Week 7: 305lbs x 5  
 Week 8: 315lbs x 5  
 Week 9: 325lbs x 5  
 Week 10: 315lbs x 5  
 Week 11: 325lbs x 5  
 Week 12: 335lbs x 5 (20lbs PR)

As you can see, the wave cycles involves taking two or three steps forwards and then one back—each time building the weights up a little higher. If you prefer to train your deadlifts twice per week, here is how it could look with a 6 week wave cycle approach:

#### **Week 1**

Monday: 305lbs x 5  
 Thursday: 325lbs x 5

#### **Week 2**

Monday: 345lbs x 5  
 Thursday: 365lbs x 5

#### **Week 3**

Monday: 325lbs x 5  
 Thursday: 345lbs x 5

#### **Week 4**

Monday: 365lbs x 5  
 Thursday: 385lbs x 5

#### **Week 5**

Monday: 345lbs x 5  
 Thursday: 365lbs x 5

#### **Week 6**

Monday: 385lbs x 5  
 Thursday: 405lbs x 5 (PR)

Wave cycles are very flexible and add some variety to your training. You have permission to experiment with them if you are past the beginner stage.

A third cycling option is to use step cycles. Step cycles involve repeating each weight twice before you earn the right to add pounds to the bar. This method is effective because the second time you lift the same weight for the same number of reps, it feels easier than the first.

Here are two examples of step cycles—one for a beginner with a best 5RM in the deadlift of 225lbs and the second for an advanced lifter with a best set of 5 of 500lbs.

Week 1: 205lbs x 5  
Week 2: 205lbs x 5  
Week 3: 225lbs x 5  
Week 4: 225lbs x 5  
Week 5: 235lbs x 5  
Week 6: 235lbs x 5  
Week 7: 245lbs x 5 (20lbs PR)

Start over on week 8 with 210lbs x 5 and aim to work back up to a PR of 250lbs or 255lbs x 5.

And for the lifter with a 5RM of 500lbs on his pull, a hypothetical step cycle could look like this:

Week 1: 405lbs x 5  
Week 2: 405lbs x 5  
Week 3: 425lbs x 5  
Week 4: 425lbs x 5  
Week 5: 445lbs x 5  
Week 6: 445lbs x 5  
Week 7: 465lbs x 5  
Week 8: 465lbs x 5  
Week 9: 485lbs x 5  
Week 10: 485lbs x 5  
Week 11: 505lbs x 5 (5 pound PR—great when you are at an advanced level)

So there you have it—3 options for cycling your deadlifting, squat and bench training. Linear cycles are near fool-proof and the best choice for novices and beginners. However, as you progress to intermediate and advanced levels, you may want to experiment with wave and step cycles.



Indeed, you can change from one to the other, from cycle to cycle. Your deadlift training could end up looking this this:

- 6 week wave cycle, training your pulls once a week
- Take a week off from deadlifting
- 8 week wave cycle, deadlifting twice per week
- Take a week off from deadlifting
- 6 week wave cycle, training your pulls once a week

And so on; you get the idea. As long as you adhere to the principle of cycling, which states that you start out moderately heavy and then build up to a new PR at the end of your cycle, you will be successful in your pursuit to get stronger.

You are now going to see the exact training cycles that I used to squat 1,214lbs and deadlift history's first 1,000lbs pull. Pay attention because I've never shared these training cycles in such great detail before...





## *The cycle that produced a 1,003lb deadlift*

- 10 weeks out from competition: 485lbs x 5 (belt only)
- 9 weeks out: 507lbs x 5 (belt only)
- 8 weeks out: 528lbs x 5 (belt only)
- 7 weeks out: 550lbs x 5 (belt only)
- 6 weeks out: 583lbs x 5 (belt only)
- 5 weeks out: 616lbs x 5 (belt only)
- 4 weeks out: 661lbs x 3 (belt only)
- 3 weeks out: 704lbs x 3 (belt and half suit)
- 2 weeks out: 750lbs x 3 (belt and half suit)
- 1 week out: rest all week and then pulled 1,003lbs at the weekend!

There you have it, the exact 10 week training cycle that I used to pull 1,003lbs. There are a few things you should know about this cycle: the 8 weeks prior to this 10 week block were extremely heavy and mostly involved pulling from a partial range (around mid-shin). This built a tremendous amount of strength and focused on my weakness—the knee up. Beginners have no business doing such specialised training and should focus on pulling from the floor, once they have correct form.

You can see from this cycle that I built up the weights progressively over the 10 week period, as is the case with all well-thought-through training cycles. However, what may confuse you is the relatively light weights I used—given that the end result was a deadlift of 1,003lbs. The reason for this is that I have a quite frankly freaky ability to train light and lift heavy when it counts (at the competition). You will need to train at a higher percentage of your 1RM (as shown in all the examples of cycling in this chapter).



You will see that I started the cycle with 5s and then reduced the reps to 3s as the weeks went on and the weights got heavier. This is a sound approach for intermediates and advanced lifters. Feel free to experiment with this if you fall into one of those two categories.





## *How to squat 1,214lbs*

Here is the exact training cycle that I used in the build up to my 1,214lb squat. You will again see that the poundages look quite light in relation to the final weight lifted. However, this is what worked for me and you must find what works for you, while adhering to the basic principles of cycling...

- 12 weeks out from the competition: 507lbs x 5 (belt and loose knee wraps)
- 11 weeks out: 540lbs x 5 (belt and loose knee wraps)
- 10 weeks out: 572lbs x 5 (belt and loose knee wraps)
- 9 weeks out: 616lbs x 5 (belt and loose knee wraps)
- 8 weeks out: 661lbs x 5 (belt and loose knee wraps)
- 7 weeks out: 726lbs x 3 (belt, loose knee wraps and single ply briefs)
- 6 weeks out: 800lbs x 3 (belt, loose knee wraps and single ply briefs)
- 5 weeks out: 860lbs x 3 (belt, loose knee wraps and single ply briefs)
- 4 weeks out: 925lbs x 2 (belt, loose knee wraps and single ply briefs)
- 3 weeks out: 990lbs x 2 (belt, loose knee wraps, 2-ply briefs and half suit)
- 2 weeks out: 550lbs x 3 (belt, loose knee wraps)
- 1 week out: rest and then put full multi-ply equipment on and squat 1,214lbs at the competition.



You will see that this looks like most well-thought-through power cycles. It starts out with modest weights and builds up to heavier poundages over the course of several weeks. You will see that 2 weeks out from the competition I dropped the weight down to 550lbs for a triple. This was to start the de-load process. You only need to be concerned with such things if you plan on competing and unless you are elite, a one week de-load is probably enough (not the 2 week de-load you see in my squat cycle).





## ***Cycling—the wrap up***

In this chapter you have discovered a highly effective and very simple way to program your strength training—cycling.

Here are the key points once again...

- You can use linear, wave, or step cycles for your strength training. If in doubt, use the simplest approach that gets you results.
- Make your cycles 4 to 12 weeks long.
- Start out with moderate weights and build up to a PR.
- Increase the weights from week to week (or session to session) by 5 to 50 pounds. Only the big boys will work with anywhere near 50 pound jumps. For mere mortals, 5 to 20 pounds jumps usually work best. Novices and beginners should stay in the realms of 5 to 10 pound jumps.
- Be flexible in your approach. If you plan a cycle and get to the end of it still feeling fresh and easily putting up your target numbers, by all means extend the cycle and milk it for all the strength gains you can get. In contrast, if you plan a cycle and start missing your target reps half way through, it may be best to take a few days off, reduce the weights and start the process again (there is no shame in doing this).

Strength training is a marathon, not a sprint, and cycling allows you to progressively get stronger without program hopping or living in hope you can simply add weight to the bar every single time you train. If the latter was the case, we'd all start on day one with the empty bar, add 5 pounds every day and end up deadlifting 1,870lbs in a year's time—it's not gonna happen! A smarter approach is required—cycling is that approach. It works for me, it worked for Ed Coan and it has worked for countless other world class lifters. Therefore, it will work for you too.

## ***Fixing a failing cycle***

Life is not perfect.

In the same way that things go wrong in your job and relationships, things will go wrong with your training cycles.

It is inevitable.

What will determine your success in the iron game is how you deal with a training cycle that is not going perfectly to plan.

Before we talk about how to fix a failing cycle, let's discuss a few key points...

Firstly, sometimes you will have a perfect training cycle. And when you do, be grateful for it and learn from it.

Secondly, when you are first starting out, you will make some mistakes. If you are a newbie/beginner and have less than a year's serious strength training under your belt, be sure to follow these rules to minimize your likelihood of failing cycles:

- Use 4 to 8 week cycles (any shorter is a waste of time and any longer is too hard to plan for and unnecessary for the beginner).
- Take small jumps from week to week (or session to session). Think in terms of 5 to 15 pound jumps. Leave the big jumps in the 20 to 50 pound range for the more experienced, stronger athlete.
- Set realistic, but manly targets. If you currently deadlift 225lbs for 5 reps and you are a man weighing 200 pounds, a target of pulling 227.5lbs in 8 weeks' time (after a training cycle) is not a manly goal. It is a wimp's goal!
- In contrast, aiming to pull 400lbs for 5 reps in 8 weeks' time is naïve optimism because it isn't going to happen.
- If you are thinking clearly and with wisdom, you will go somewhere in the middle and aim for a PR of 235lbs or 240lbs x 5 reps (a solid 10 to 15 pound increase in your 5 rep max from 8 weeks training).

Now, let's talk about how to fix a failing training cycle...

A couple of years ago a powerlifter came to train with my team and he had an ego that was somewhat bigger than his talent (and his squat).

For reasons unknown to me and my regular training partners, this guy (who was a good but definitely not great lifter at national level), thought it would be a good idea to call himself "Dr Squat" while training with me.

At that point I had a 1,214lbs squat on my resume, and he had squatted just over 900lbs. The guy was deluded to say the least.

Anyway, he comes in every Wednesday (squat and deadlift night at our gym) and he'd get really fired up. And because he caught me early in my training cycle, he got carried away and tried to hang with me.

**BIG MISTAKE.**



The first three weeks he out squats me by 10 to 15kg each week. I didn't care because I was sticking to my cycle. But he was loving it because his little brain was telling him that he was "Dr Squat" and that he was now stronger than me.

Oh dear.

He forgets about his training cycle numbers (which looked sensible when he showed them to me on week 1) and he starts trying to beat me every week—he must have forgotten that the meet is what counts, not what you lift at the gym!

Anyhow, by week 4 he's struggling. He cuts the top set high and out-lifts me by just a few kilos.

We are still several weeks out from competition, so I'm still finding my top sets very easy.

The weeks roll by and all of a sudden he has nowhere to go... So he starts lifting the same top set every week and the squats are getting higher and higher as he fatigues and overtraining sets in.

Needless to say, I stuck to my cycle and blew 490kg away as my opener at the meet. Unfortunately I got miss-loaded on my next 2 attempts and injured my knee (I called 525kg and they loaded one side to 565kg).

Anyhow, back to "Dr Squat"—well, come meet time he is gassed. Over-trained and good for nothing, and I think he only got 1 attempt out of 3 and it was well off his personal best.

We re-named him "Dr Stupid" (actually, it could have been something worse) and never saw him again.

So, rule number 1 is... don't let your ego get in the way. There is no point trying to lift with guys who are 30% stronger than you. Sure, get inspired by those guys, but don't base your training cycles on their training cycles.

Such egotistical behavior has been the un-doing and downfall of many a powerlifter and gym rat alike.

But, what if you are being sensible and your training cycle still goes wrong?

It happens.

Let's say you have a current 3 rep max of 400lbs on your deadlift.

You plan a solid training cycle with the aim of ending with 425lbs for a triple.

It looks like this:

Week 1: 285 x 3

Week 2: 305 x 3

Week 3: 325 x 3

Week 4: 345 x 3

Week 5: 365 x 3

Week 6: 385 x 3

Week 7: 405 x 3

Week 8: 425 x 3

However, on week 5 you pull 365 x 3 and barely grind out your third rep. On week 6 you get the first rep with 385 and then miss the second.

Clearly something is wrong. But what do you do?

First of all, do not pig-headedly carry on and try to pull 425 x 3. You will get it in the future but not in two weeks time on this cycle.

Instead, you have several sensible options:

1. **Take a week off and then come back and try the week 6 weight again.** If 385 x 3 flies without a problem, carry on as you were (you clearly just need some rest).

On the other hand, if 385 x 3 is still hard, start a new cycle.

2. **Go back a couple of weeks.** For example, you missed week 6's weight, so go back to week 3 and work back up again.

Okay, so it took you a few more weeks to reach your target of 425lbs x 3 reps than expected, but with some careful thought and some sensible planning, you got there in the end. This is a much better approach than most gym rats use—chopping and changing from program to program every time they have to deal with a little adversity.

3. **Change stances.** You could be stalling because you have done too much of one type of pulling. So if you have pulled conventional for months on end, start a new cycle and hit the sumo style.

Then, after one cycle sumo, switch back to conventional again—fresh and excited to attack the deadlift with that style.

So you have plenty of options for fixing a failing cycle. The most important thing to remember is that stubbornly plowing forwards despite the cycle not working is a recipe for disaster.



The solution is almost always some sort of rest. Rest can be in the form of a week off or going back to easier weeks in your cycle.

Finally, what happens if your cycle is failing and you have a competition to peak for?

This is somewhat trickier, because the competition date does not change simply because you are having a bad time with your training.

So, what should you do?

Well, it depends how far out you are. If you are very close to the meet (within 2 to 3 weeks) it is probably best to back off and do nothing or just do speed work (50 to 60% for 6 to 10 singles or 3 to 5 doubles) because most lifters do best on their deadlifts when they are fresh.

In other words, a bit less training usually does well, whereas more training can just lead to over-training.

However, if you are 8 weeks out and you have a 12 week run up to the meet and you realize that you are not going to hit the numbers you had planned for the final 4 weeks leading into the meet, your solution is to re-assess your goal and adjust your numbers accordingly.

There is no shame in reducing your poundages each week by 20 pounds if it means that you peak at the meet. In fact, that is the sensible lifter's approach.

Just remember the story of my friend "Dr Squat/Stupid" and you will not go far wrong.

What a fool.

## ***Off-season cycling (going for a raw 3RM or 5RM instead of a geared single)***

If you compete in powerlifting, you may have a period of the year that you call "the off-season".

This is a time when you do not have any competitions (at least not major ones) and you should use this time to work on your raw strength.

When you compete in equipment all the time, the equipment can create muscular imbalances. It is for this reason that it is important to train raw some of the year.

Heavy singles can take their toll, both mentally and physically. Therefore, the off-season is a good time to use 3 and 5 rep maxes.

If you are looking to increase your muscle mass, as well as your strength, the extra volume that triples and fives provide can help you to do that. When you need hypertrophy, more volume is nearly always the answer.

Planning your training for a max triple or five is actually easier than for a max single.

If you want to beat your best five rep max, just draw up a training cycle that has you doing 5s every session, ending with a PB on the final week.

Here is how that might look using a 6 week cycle, and assuming that your previous best set of 5 was 315lbs.

Week 1: 230lbs x 5  
Week 2: 250lbs x 5  
Week 3: 270lbs x 5  
Week 4: 290lbs x 5  
Week 5: 310lbs x 5  
Week 6: 330lbs x 5 PR

As you can see, a training cycle of this nature is remarkably simple and yet highly effective. A solid 15 pound PR being the end result of these 6 weeks of hypothetical training. A good return on your investment.

If you want to go for a three rep max, you have several options...

Do a cycle like the one above, but use a set of 3 reps each week.

Use 5's at the start of the cycle, and then switch to 3's before you hit your 5 rep max. In the example above you could do the first 5 weeks as they are, then switch to triples for 5 weeks and end with a 3 rep max.

If you are feeling very confident and strong, you could hit a 5 rep max, then switch to 3s and nail a 3 rep max. Here is how that might look for a lifter with a 3 rep max of 400lbs in the deadlift...

Week 1: 280lbs x 5  
Week 2: 300lbs x 5  
Week 3: 320lbs x 5  
Week 4: 340lbs x 5  
Week 5: 360lbs x 5  
Week 6: 380lbs x 5 PR, now switch to triples  
Week 7: 340lbs x 3 (a deliberately easy session to allow recovery from last weeks PR)  
Week 8: 360lbs x 3  
Week 9: 390lbs x 3  
Week 10: 425 x 3 PR



## ***On 3 x 5 and 5 x 5 in the off-season***

In effect, nearly all of my off-season training for the squat, bench press and deadlift is 3 x 5 or 5 x 5—but not in the conventional sense. When many lifters think of these protocols they think of them very rigidly. My approach is much more fluid.

I will usually write out a rough 6 week cycle. On the 6th week, I have a 3 or 5 rep set in mind. It may or may not be a PR but it'll be tough. On weeks 1 to 5, I'll go into the gym knowing what my top set is. However, I will play my warm ups by ear.

Let me give you an example to show you what I mean. Let's say I am drawing up a squat cycle where I am to peak on week 6 with 362.5kg x 5. Here is how the top set might look each for each week:

Week 1: 227.5kg x 5

Week 2: 250kg x 5

Week 3: 272.5kg x 5

Week 4: 300kg x 5

Week 5: 332.5kg x 5

Week 6: 362.5kg x 5

Now, all I'm really bothered about is the top set, so I'll do the amount of reps on the warm up sets that will make me feel strongest on my top set. Some weeks that may mean doing 3 to 4 sets of 5 before attacking my top set. Other weeks I may feel very loose and only need singles, doubles, and triples on my warm up sets. The focus is always the top set.

I will never do sets across. They are good for beginners and/or if you need hypertrophy, but I don't like them because they are boring and do not allow enough emphasis on the top set. I also like to lift as explosively as possible and find it easier to do with one focused top set, rather than 3 to 5 sets of 5 at a lesser weight.





# Your First Year's Plan



Once you have gotten your technique in the squat, bench press, and deadlift to a good level—you can then ‘put your foot down’ and start to focus on building serious strength (but don’t you dare do this until your technique is solid).

When you are first starting out, building strength is relatively easy.

I have seen beginners go from a 60kg/135lbs deadlift to 227.5kg/500lbs in a year. On the other hand, I pushed my deadlift from 1,003lb to 1,008lbs and it took me 5 years—such is the life of a super-elite athlete!

Do not overcomplicate your first year’s training. This would be a big mistake. Save the more complicated training methods for when you get to an intermediate level of strength and have to overcome plateaus.

If you are sensible with your training in your first year, you should be able to get stronger virtually every week, without having to do anything complicated.

For year 1, sets of 5 reps rule.

5 is a magic number because it enables you to build strength and muscle simultaneously.

On the other hand, singles and doubles require more experience to perform safely than a set of 5 because you are working at a higher intensity. And leave sets of 10 and 12 for the bodybuilders.

Contrary to conventional thinking, sets of 10 and 12 are a recipe for injury. Think about it:

Which is easier to do...

Perform 5 reps with perfect technique, or 12 reps?

Case closed.

5 reps it is!

As soon as your technique is solid, proceed like this:

Perform 8 week cycles.

On week 1 choose a weight you think you could do for 10 reps and do a set of 5 (after warm up sets). YES, this will feel easy—but that's the point.

On week 2, add 2.5kg/5pounds to your squat and bench press numbers and 5kg to your deadlift numbers.

Here's an example of how that looks (only the top set is shown— you must do several warm up sets first):

Week 1: 80kg x 5

Week 2: 85kg x 5

Week 3: 90kg x 5

Week 4: 95kg x 5

Week 5: 100kg x 5

Week 6: 105kg x 5

Week 7: 110kg x 5

Week 8: 115kg x 5

Obviously that was a deadlift example because the jumps were 5kg each week.

After 8 weeks, be honest with yourself and ask this question:

— How hard was the set of 5 on week 8?

If it was easy and you think you could have gotten 8 or 9 reps, carry on with the cycle and keep adding 5kg each week.

If it was difficult (perhaps the 5th rep was a 'grinder' or you think you could only have gotten one more rep), start another 8 week cycle.



This time, instead of starting at 80kg, you'd start over with 85kg or 90kg and end on 120kg or 125kg.

Using this method you will be able to continuously progress for your first year. Once you get a little experience, after say, the first 6 months, you may experiment with cycles of different lengths such as 6 weeks or 12 weeks.

If at any point you feel like you can't hit the projected number on the final week of your cycle, do not be afraid to shut the cycle down a week or two early and start over.

During this first year, keep things simple and train Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

Train your squats on Monday, your bench presses on Wednesday and your deadlifts on Friday.

After performing the major lift, follow this up with basic assistance exercises. Here are the assistance exercises you should perform:

**After squatting:**

- Leg press (4 to 5 sets of 8 to 12 reps)
- Lying leg curls (3 sets of 12 to 15 reps)
- DB side bends (3 sets of 6 to 8 reps/side)

**After bench pressing:**

- Military press: (3 sets of 8 to 12 reps)
- Bent over DB lateral raises (3 sets of 10 to 12 reps)
- DB lateral raises (3 sets of 10 to 12 reps)

**After deadlifting:**

- Reverse lunges (3 sets of 6 to 8 reps/side)
- Leg press (3 sets of 25 reps)
- Lying leg curls (3 sets of 25 reps)
- RKC plank (3 sets of 10 second holds)
- Pull ups (3 sets of as many reps as possible)
- Low pulley rows (5 sets of 8 to 12 reps)

For variety's sake you may change the assistance exercises for similar exercises every 4 to 8 weeks. For example, you could switch from military presses to overhead DB presses. Or you could switch from low pulley rows to DB rows.

As you can see, your first year of training does not need to be complicated and you will make far better progress keeping things simple as discussed in this section.





# How To Develop a Great Team and a Bullet-Proof Mind-Set

## And Prepare for Your First Competition



ver the years there have been some great powerlifters who have trained alone. However, most (me included) have trained in a team.

Some prefer a small team of 2 to 3 lifters and others, like me, have always thrived in a larger team environment. Throughout my training career I have always performed my heavy Monday and Wednesday training sessions with anywhere between 4 and 9 teammates by my side.

This set up is not perfect for everyone because some lifters do not like the relatively long rests that are a natural by-product of training in a large team. For those lifters, a smaller team of 2 or 3 people would be better.

Whatever your preference, if you want to get really strong, I recommend training in a team. Going solo is a tougher route for sure.

## ***How to choose great teammates***

The main rule of the team is that everybody should 'give' as well as take. I quickly boot the 'takers' out of my team as soon as I spot them.

When someone new joins my team they do so on a trial basis. Some don't make it past the first session, others last 10 years. It is important to realize that I never axe anybody because they are weaker than me (if I did I'd run out of training partners pretty soon). No, I axe people when they 'take' and don't 'give' and fail to meet certain expectations.

Here is what I look for in my team:

- People who turn up for nearly every session, or every session.
- People who turn up on time.
- People who are willing to help set up the equipment at the start of the session and are willing to help tidy up at the end.
- Fast learners.
- People who quickly start to help other lifters out with technique 'cues' during training and discussions about training cycles, assistance exercises etc.
- People who are willing to help out at competitions even when they themselves are not competing.
- People who follow the spotting/loading system that we have in place and do not shy away from doing these boring but necessary jobs.
- People who are passionate about improving. I don't care whether you are training for your first 300lbs squat or a 1,000lbs squat... I have to see some heart and desire if you are going to train with me.

Another thing to look for when choosing team mates is people who are going to push you. This is easier for you to achieve than me!

If you squat 400lbs, try to choose a guy who squats 500lbs to train with (don't just massage your ego by training with a 225lbs squatter. Better to be a small fish in a big pond than vice versa).

The great thing about powerlifting is that almost everybody has a weak link. My weak link has always been my bench, so I've always tried to surround myself with good benchers. That way, they encourage me and teach me. Then I help them with their squats and deadlifts.

## ***The key to success—your mind-set***

It is somewhat ironic that 90% of articles and books written on training never mention mind-set. The reality is that mind-set is your most important weapon for getting stronger and for success in all areas of your life.

If your mind is weak, you are doomed to failure.

Get your mind strong, and you can lift the weight of the Earth.

I have always been strong mentally when it comes to training and competing. However, I have had to help more than my fair share of good teammates who struggled only in one department—the things between their ears.



I have seen it all...

Guys who can't stop puking on meet day.

Guys who can't eat on meet day.

Guys who sabotage their own success because they can't resist another Saturday night drinking binge.

Guys who go into self-destruct mode when they miss a lift in the gym.

You name it, I've seen it.

With that said, I'd like to give you some ideas for creating the kind of mind-set that has enabled me to break numerous world records and win national and world titles over and over again:

## ***7 Steps to a bullet-proof mind-set***

### **1. Realize that strength training is a violent pursuit**

You may have never thought about strength training as something violent, but it is.

Think about it: when you squat, you put a weight on your back that could potentially cripple you if it all goes wrong. When you bench, you lift a bar above your body that if dropped on your neck will probably kill you.

And the deadlift encourages you to lift weights from the floor that could break your back if you don't have the correct form and know how to stay tight.

Indeed, if you don't get a buzz from watching MMA, boxing, rugby, American football or some other "violent" sport, you are probably not cut out for serious strength training.

However, if you do get a kick out of watching those sports and have a passion for getting stronger, you need to develop...

### **2. Aggression**

If you want to dominate the kind of weights that the average lifters can't even hope to lift, you have to be aggressive.

When you are in the hole on the squat, with your max on your back, you have to drive that bar back to the start position like your life depends on it.

The same goes for the bench press: when the bar touches your chest, you have to crush it with serious aggression and drive it back to the start position.

And as for the deadlift, I don't think any other lift is so dependent on being in the right state of mind. Watch my world record deadlifts and you will see my training partner slap my face beforehand for several minutes.

As Dave "Bulldog" Beattie does this I am allowing my aggression to build. When the time comes I push Dave out of the way (not easy to do given that he's 300lbs) and then I unleash hell on the bar.

That's the kind of attitude all the best guys have.

If you want to see aggression, watch me lift, watch Captain Kirk lift, watch Chuck Vogelphol lift, watch my training partner Brian Reynolds lift—all great lifters, all very aggressive.

You can get ok strength without aggression, but if you want to be super strong, you have to be an animal.

With that said, you also need...

### **3. Clarity**

The ability to think clearly and see things as they are is of vital importance to the strength athlete.

Only when you think clearly will you be able to objectively work out your weaknesses and address them accordingly.

Only when you think clearly will you know when to push and when to hold back, when to get psyched up before a lift and when to just be aggressive when you are actually under the bar.

Only when you think clearly will you be able to stay injury free and ensure your own longevity.

Clarity is essential for success. Most people are unclear and unsuccessful. There is a pattern right there.

### **4. Visualization**

Visualization is a simple yet highly powerful mental skill that all successful people have.

Science has proven that if you think about something over and over again and with enough intensity, your brain can't actually tell the difference between whether or not you have actually done what you are thinking about or just imagined it.



So... the trick is to visualize yourself going for and SUCCEEDING with personal bests over and over again before you actually attempt them.

I “saw myself” lift 1,008lbs thousands of times before I actually pulled it for real. When the time came to do it in competition, I actually felt like it was nothing new.

Embrace visualization and use it to help you get stronger.

At the same time...

## 5. Avoid excess negativity

The reason why I say to avoid excess negativity and not just to avoid negativity is because we all have negative thoughts and we always will have.

The difference is that some people dwell on negative thoughts and allow them to sabotage their success, while others quickly eliminate them and/or work out if there is a hidden message.

In relation to lifting, the biggest example of negativity is people who see themselves missing personal bests.

Never, ever do this and if you catch yourself doing this, stop it straight away and imagine yourself succeeding 10 times.

In order to ‘catch’ negative thoughts before they get out of hand, you must have...

## 6. Focus

Tony Robbins says that most people live their lives like a leaf on a river. In other words—they go where the river takes them, with no real control over where they are going.

If you want control over your life and your strength, you must be like the speed boat on the river; able to pick its course and do what it wants—instead of being dictated to by your surroundings and circumstances... you must take control and make things happen.

When you are focused, you will naturally take control and spend your time more wisely.

Right now, do a quick exercise that will get you focused...

- Take out a sheet of paper
- Write down three 30 day goals
- Write down three 3 month goals

- Write down three 12 month goals
- Write down a big, outrageous 3 to 5 year goal

Read these goals every day and tick them off as you do achieve them.

Finally, you must be:

## **7. Flexible**

Bruce Lee talks about flowing like water.

You must be the same. No matter how well you plan, things will always need to be tweaked and altered along the way. That goes for strength training and everything you do in life.

Do not be stubborn, be flexible.

If something's not working, be man enough to change it.

## ***How to prepare for your first competition***

Should you choose to compete—your first competition can be a little nerve-wracking.

The most important thing to do is to relax (not under the bar) and have some fun. After all, you are not getting paid to do this—and you are meant to enjoy it.

The first thing you need to do is to choose a federation to compete in. Choose a federation that has RAW competitions and read the rules carefully.

Yes, reading the rules is boring, but missing lifts because you broke the rules is totally unacceptable. So get them read!

Next, prepare your training cycle for the meet.

When writing your training cycle, aim to peak on meet day. When I say peak, I mean that you should aim to show your best strength on the day of the meet. (The more you compete, the better you will become at peaking.)

Before the meet, you should get yourself a handler. A handler is somebody who comes with you to the meet to help you out. This person must be reliable and ideally it will be one of your training partners or at least somebody who understands powerlifting.



Another very important thing to do is to pack your bag the night before your meet. Packing on the day is super-stressful and a bit of a nightmare.

Don't make that mistake.

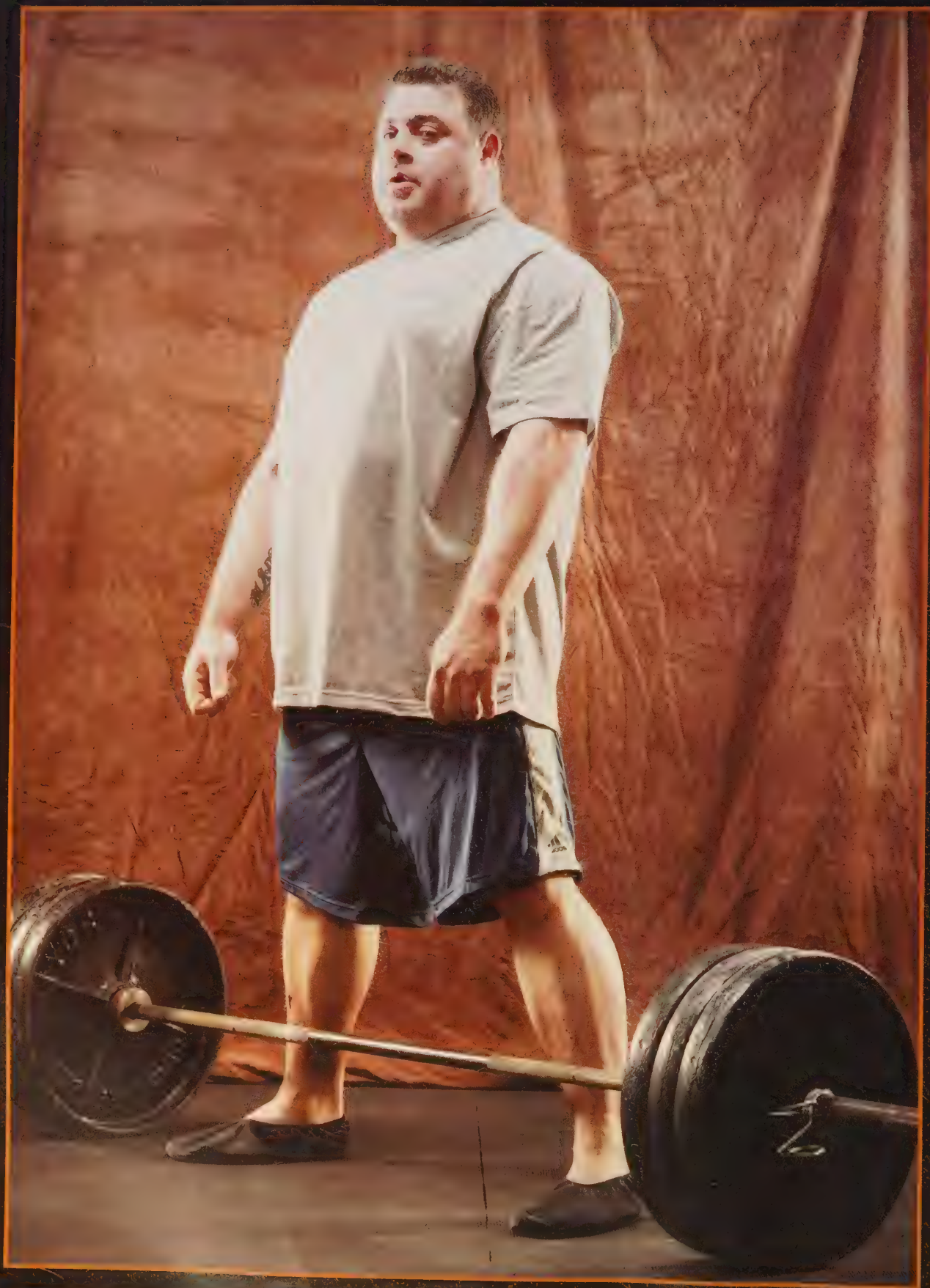
Here's what you should have in your bag at the very least:

- Lifting singlet
- Belt
- Squat/bench shoes
- T-shirt
- Deadlift slippers
- Wrist wraps
- Belt
- Knee sleeves or knee wraps (if legal in your federation)
- 4 liters of water
- Food
- A towel

You will also need a strategy for your meet that includes knowing your openers and 2nd and 3rd attempts.

For your opener I suggest picking a weight you can triple in the gym, or a single that you can do even if you feel absolutely lousy.

Talking of openers, remember this: the only reason anyone ever bombs is because they opened too heavy. Better to open a little light and get a number on the board.





# CHAPTER II

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## How to Lift More

### How to Deadlift More

#### *How I deadlift*

I deadlift using the conventional style.

I tried sumo once and quickly found I severely lacked the inner thigh mobility to pull off this style with any kind of professionalism. For the record, I think I checked out with around 350kg for a single. At the time my conventional was over 440kg, so as you can see, the sumo wasn't the style for me.

As is the case for all good pullers, my deadlift style is the product of my levers, my particular strengths, and a lot of hard work!

What this means is that I pull without a great deal of bend in the knees, with very vertical shins and with an arched lower back. I believe that my pull is a fairly equal combination of leg drive, lower back, and upper back strength. However, the truth of the matter is that I have no way to prove this without going to a 'lab' and having a scientist see how much force all my muscles are generating at different times during my deadlift.


The bottom line is that my technique works perfectly for me and provides maximum strength and minimum injury-risk.

NOTE: For anyone thinking of pulling with a rounded lower back or even a very rounded upper back: your injury-risk will be much higher than if you chose to use a style more like my own.

Let's take a more detailed look at my deadlift technique:

I address the bar with a hip width stance, shins touching the bar.

Then I bend down and set my hands on the bar; as I do this I bend my legs only enough to grasp the bar. Remember, this is a deadlift not a squat!

A photograph of a man in a light-colored t-shirt and dark shorts performing a deadlift. He is bent over at the hips, with his back straight and his hands on a barbell. The barbell has a large black weight plate on it. The background is a textured, reddish-brown wall.

***I bend my legs  
only enough to  
grasp the bar.  
Remember, this  
is a deadlift not a  
squat!***



This next point is very important: when I set my hands on the bar I use a mixed grip and make sure that my arms are hanging straight down from my shoulders. If I was to take my arms out and away from my shins I'd be turning the pull into more of a snatch grip deadlift. With max weights this would make a bicep tear likely and would significantly reduce the amount of weight I could lift.

To re-cap:

- Hip width stance
- Shins touch the bar
- Arms hang straight down from the shoulders and take a mixed grip on the bar

Another point you should be aware of is with regards to my head position. My neutral head position means that I am looking at a spot on the floor about 6 to 8 feet in front of me when I am in the start position of my pull. I don't listen to all those dudes saying, "Look up, look up!"

What I do next is allow my hips to rise and then forcefully pull them back down so that my shins touch the bar. I do this again and then I do it a third time.

On the third go, I pull. Be aware that as I pull my scapulae are directly over the bar—this is essential for a strong deadlift.

What you need to understand is that each time I pull my hips down into the bar I am generating more force. In other words, I don't go from relaxed to generating over 1,000lbs of force in a split second. Instead, I allow the force to build over the course of a second or two, using these three 'dips'.

NOTE: That's why you see the bar bending before I pull it.

When the bar leaves the floor, my abs and lats are as tight as I can possibly get them. The abs are braced—imagine what you would do if you were about to get punched in the stomach to absorb the force and you will understand the meaning of 'braced'.

Most average lifters 'get' the concept of bracing the abs fairly quickly, but many struggle with getting their lats tight. This tightness of the lats and abs is what enables me to keep my lower back in a good position throughout the pull, while also preventing any 'strength leakages'.

To get the feeling of locking your lats, set-up in your regular deadlift stance... Now have your training partner karate chop you in the lats 5 times. Providing you are alive, you will soon learn to tense your lats! Once you understand how to tense your lats, lock them at the start of the pull and keep them like that throughout.

Now, back to *my* pull...

As the bar leaves the floor, I keep it very close—that's why all great deadlifters have scars on their shins. Letting the bar drift away from your shins and out in front of you is a great way to fail a big deadlift attempt. For every cm you allow it to get in front of you, the weight feels much heavier and greatly stresses the lower back.

**The bar must stay close.**



So the bar **must** stay close.

As I lift the bar higher and higher off the ground I carry on squeezing my grip as hard as possible. As the bar passes my knees I drive the hips forward to lockout the weight.

At lockout I stand tall, chest out, shoulders back and down.



*At lockout I  
stand tall, chest  
out, shoulders  
back and down.*



I *do not* hyperextend at lockout—always the tell-tale sign of an inexperienced puller or simply a masochist who enjoys hurting his or her lower back!

Once locked out I usually do some immature, fancy stuff like sticking my tongue out and looking at the crowd, but you don't need to this.

All that's then left is to stay tight, push the hips back and lower the bar to the floor.

Let's summarize my deadlift technique:

- Set-up with a hip width stance, shins touching the bar, toes turned slightly out.
- Letting my arms hang down from my shoulders, I take a mixed grip on the bar.
- I now let my hips rise and do 3 'dips' into the bar.
- On the third dip, I pull.
- My abs are braced and my lats are locked.
- As I pull, the bar stays close to my body at all times.
- As the bar clears my knees I drive my hips through to lockout.
- At lockout I stand tall but don't hyperextend.

That's it—that's how I deadlift.

One final point: you'll notice that my hips and back lockout at the same time.

For many lifters their legs are locked out a long time before the pull is completed, leaving their backs to finish the pull.

I believe this increases injury-risk for the back.



When discussing different levels of lift mastery, David Whitley, Master RKC, made a martial arts analogy of belts. White belts, colored belts, and black belts all practice the same basic straight punch—but with a different level of understanding. The purpose of this chapter is to take your deadlift technique to the black belt level.

## **Black belt start**

There are different ways to start your pull, most of them originated in weightlifting.

First, there is the static start you have already learned. Its advantage is the certainty of assuming the correct posture and getting tight. Its downside is not having the stretch reflex to help you. I am sure that you know that once you quickly stretch a muscle, it wants to snap back. This reflex helps you jump. You dip quickly and instantly leap up. But if you pause on the bottom, your jump will be noticeably less powerful. That said, some elite pullers like Konstantin Konstantinov use the static start, so do not be quick to write it off. A great piece of



advice for a strong and effective static start comes from Mark Chaillet. “Put 100 pounds of tension on the bar before blasting off,” advises this champion who stood up with 881 pounds a couple of decades ago.

Then there is the dive start. Great Lamar Gant, the first man to deadlift five times his body-weight—661lbs @ 132lbs—was a proponent of this style. He would get tight standing up, then slowly fight his way against his muscle tension down to the bar. As soon as he reached the bar, he would quickly set his grip and go. The dive is an effective way to start a pull as it allows one to get very tight and gives you some boost from the stretch reflex. I said “some” because the muscles are not stretched very quickly. Some lifters like Ano Turtiainen dive down to the bar quickly, as do weightlifters. The problems with the quick dive are: it is harder to stay tight and harder to hit your precise starting position. Fast or slow, many lifters like the psychological benefits of the dive. The moment you have gripped the bar, you have to go. The dive does not allow one to fool around and possibly get psyched out before a big pull.

Finally, there is the rocking start, as practiced by Andy Bolton. Set your grip with your legs nearly straight, then quickly pull yourself down into the starting position. Immediately shoot your tail up again and straighten out your legs to sharply stretch your hamstrings and fire up the stretch reflex. Repeat this pumping action one to three times. Andy does it thrice and he keeps building up more and more tension on the bar with each pump. When you have dropped your hips for the last time and pulled the bar against your shins, immediately drive your feet through the deck and get out of Dodge.

Russian weightlifting research (Zhekov, 1976) showed the rocking to be most effective—as long as your timing is right. Which is why we did not teach it to you in the beginning.

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## ***My Rocking Style:***

**AB**

If you’ve ever seen me deadlift, you’ll see that I grab the bar, dip 3 times and then pull.

To be honest, this is something I’ve always done because it felt natural. However, thinking about it, it does make sense.

Here’s why:

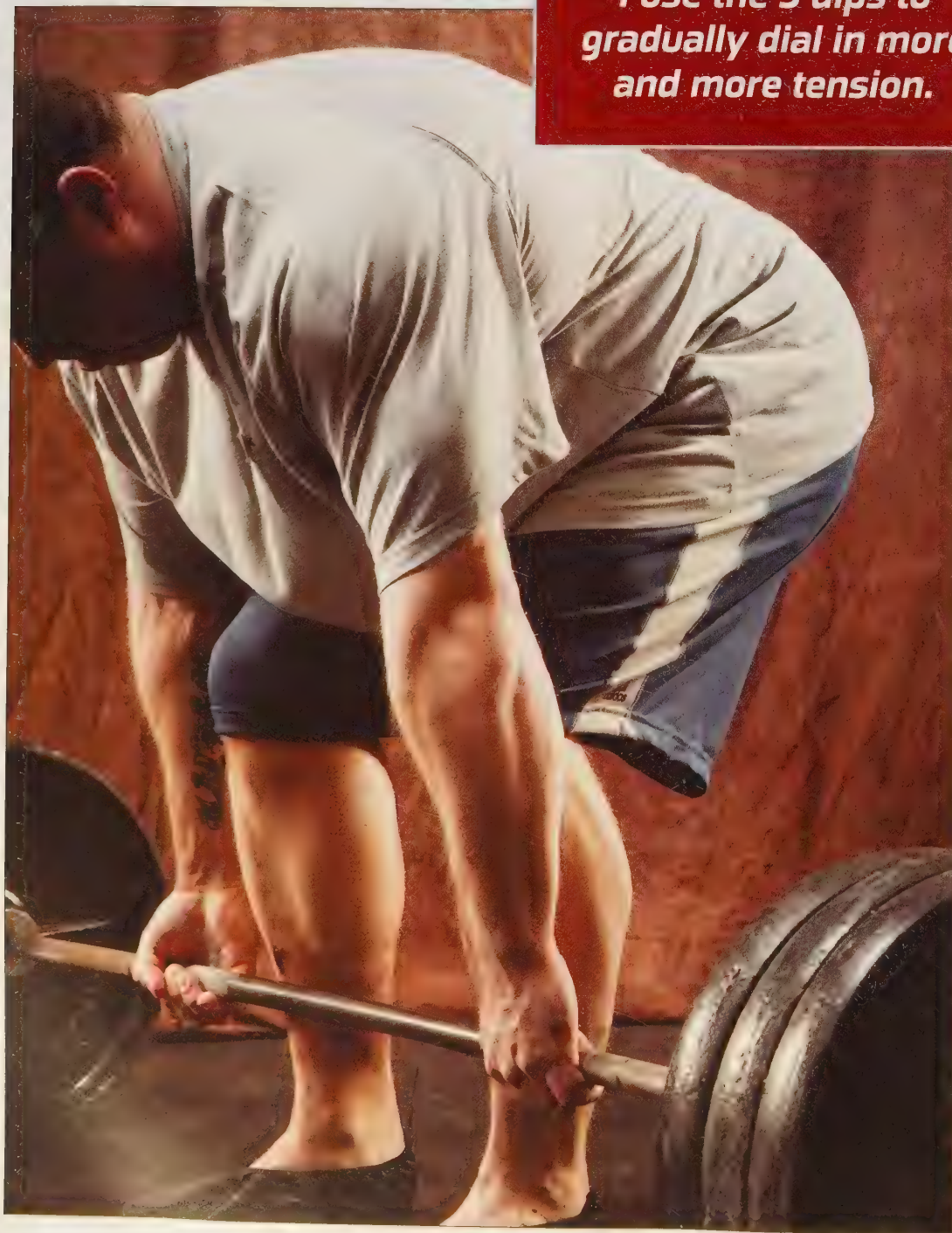
On each successive dip I’m pulling a bit more slack out of the bar. In other words, I’m gradually generating tension before I pull. Obviously, if I’m pulling 1,000lbs, I have to generate in excess of 1,000lbs, to budge the bar off the floor, but instead of trying to generate that power in a split second—I use the 3 dips to gradually dial in more and more tension.

Using this style I also find it easy to keep my arms straight, which is essential for maximum strength and injury prevention. Have you ever seen those guys who attempt to yank the bar off the floor—then their arms bend and a bicep tears? Ouch!

As I rock/dip you'll also notice that my weight shifts to my toes, then heels—and back again. However, when I pull, my whole foot is flat and I'm clawing my toes into the floor.

Remember the law of irradiation?

***I use the 3 dips to gradually dial in more and more tension.***





## Don't "leak" your deadlift strength!

**P** Several years ago I met two men who have greatly contributed to my understanding of strength. One was boxing coach Steve Baccari, RKC, the other, spine biomechanist Prof. Stuart McGill. These two gentlemen independently coined the term "leakage" as it applies to your athletic strength. Once you have understood the concept, identified your personal "leaks" in the deadlift, and "plugged" them up, I guarantee that you will see a remarkable jump in your pulling power.

Prof. McGill explains the concept, "Concentric contraction increases energy while eccentric contraction absorbs energy." So, if a concentric action at a strong joint forces a weaker joint into eccentric contraction, then that is one form of leak. Consider hip extension if the heel is forced into the ground. A flat foot on the ground would remove the leak in that case. So, eccentric contraction along the line of drive is a leak. Ballistic hip contraction and a soft core is a form of leak while a stiff core transmits the force without loss to the shoulders. ("You can't push a rope but you can push a stone.")

In other words, if one muscle group is pushing hard and another is not doing its job, the latter will yield instead of assisting and suck up the former's strength like a black hole.

There are at least ten potential leakage points in the DL: the feet, ankles, knees, hips, lumbar spine, thoracic spine, shoulder blades, elbows, wrists and fingers. Let us figure out what brings out these leakages and what type of "plumbing" intervention they require.

But first, a point must be made. The following does not imply that you should not start your deads with your knees forward, hips high, the back rounded, etc. Just that these joints should not get "more that way" once the pull is on its way. You may begin with whatever degree of flexion in all these joints that your technique and leverage demands. But after that there is only one way for them to go—into extension.

### • Feet

The Chinese say that you start dying from your feet. So does your deadlift. When your paws get squished under a crushing load, you are giving away pounds to your competitors.

Get your feet healthy and strong. Hike barefoot, pick up little rocks with your toes, balance on one foot, take up karate, etc.

One-legged deadlifts will go a long way. Not only will they strengthen your feet and make them feel the ground, they will build up your hamstrings and glutes.

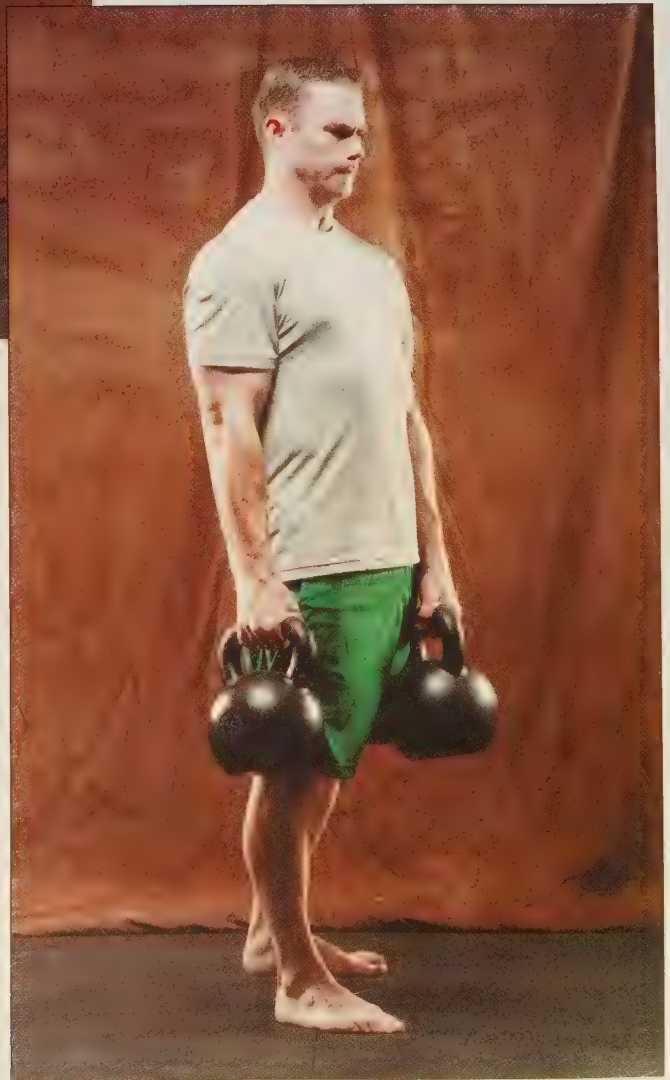
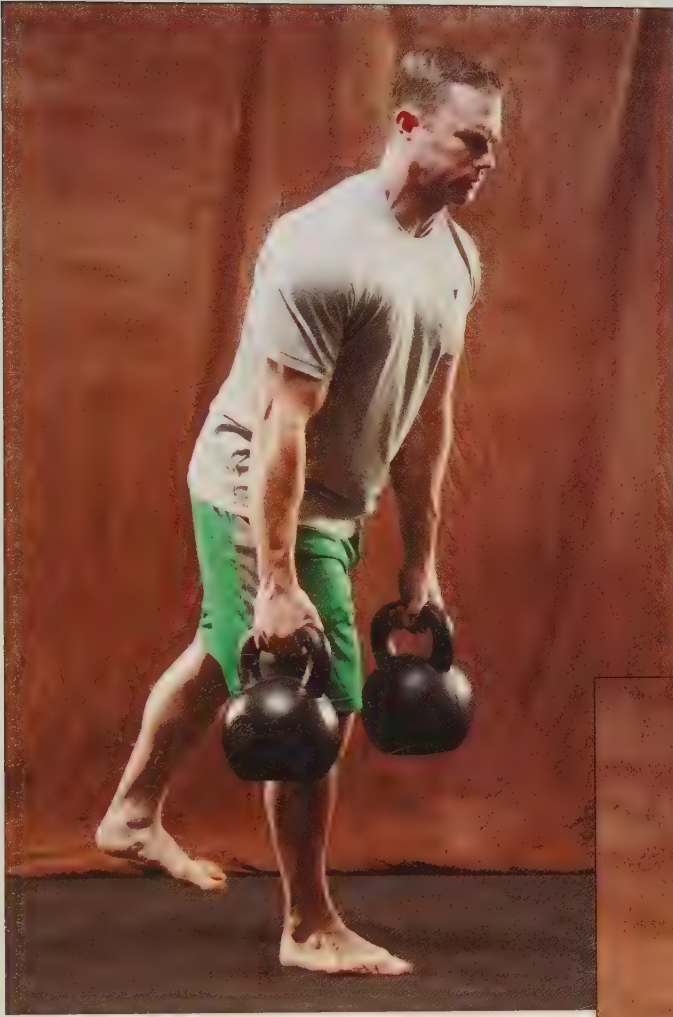
Use a pair of light kettlebells or dumbbells. Assume the standard DL starting position—but with one leg behind you. Brace, grip the deck with your toes—you must be barefoot or in deadlift slippers—and squeeze the weight off the deck. Move fairly slowly to challenge your stabilizing muscles. Pause for 2sec at the lockout with your glutes cramped tight and the knee of the working leg locked.



Descend under control—this is not a competition style deadlift—and park the bell or bells. Relax momentarily, then reengage the tension and proceed with the next rep.







## • Ankles

The ankles extend together with the knees to form the “leg drive”. I got reminded of that fact when I tried doing some deadlift stance leg presses with a spasm in my calf. No go!

Consider that if you start the pull with your shins slightly tilted forward, as most lifters do, those shins will have to get vertical before the bar reaches the knees. And the muscles responsible for that action are the calves. If you start the dead with your shins vertical, as Andy and a few other top pullers do, you still have to drive with those calves in order not to let your knees slip forward. There is an intense isometric calf contraction.

It does not at all mean that you should think about recruiting your calves when you are deadlifting. If you keep your attention on **pushing your feet through the ground and commit to not letting the knees move forward** at all once the pull is on the way, the calves will do their job as a part of the team without getting micromanaged.

## • Knees

This leak shows up as a “hitch”, or rebending the knees before finishing the pull. It gets red lights in competition.

Again, you stopped pushing with your feet too soon. You must understand that even though the quads and calves don’t contribute much to the lift at this stage, their tension is required to stabilize or “anchor” the efforts of the glutes and hamstrings to bring the lift home.

At the RKC kettlebell instructor workshop, we use the “static stomp deadlift” remedial drill to teach to stay with the leg drive all the way to the top. It is best to do barefoot. Deadlift a light weight—we use a pair of kettlebells, you may pick up a straight bar with one to three wheels per side—and pause at the lockout. Breathe shallow, hissing here and there, and stay tight for the duration of the drill.

Visualize that your feet are pressing harder and harder into the deck. Emulate Russian weightlifting legend Yuri Vlasov who used to say that his feet “burned” from the pressure he applied through them during his pulls and squats.

Grip the ground with your toes and consciously add tension to your quads (“**pull up the knee caps**”), glutes (“**crush a walnut**”), abs (“**brace for a punch**”, “**slightly shorten the distance between your sternum and your pelvis**”), obliques (“**push your sides out**”), and lats (“**push your arms down and back, as if swimming**”, “**break the bar**”) while relaxing the traps and the neck.



A full-body photograph of a man with a mustache and a goatee, wearing a grey t-shirt and dark blue shorts, performing a deadlift. He is holding a barbell with both hands, and his arms are extended downwards. The background is a textured, reddish-brown wall. Two red text boxes are overlaid on the image: one in the upper right corner and one in the lower right corner.

**Think "long arms".**

**Ignore the  
barbell and  
focus on your  
feet and on  
the tension.**

Think “long arms”. Ignore the bell or bells and focus on your feet and on the tension. It helps to have a training partner who can pound your glutes, abs, and quads.

Think of your body as a cylinder. Neither lean back, nor forward. Neither blow up, nor collapse your ribcage. Keep your neck neutral, a continuation of the spine. Neither chicken it forward, nor crank it up. Roll your shoulders neither forward, nor back.

Keep pushing your feet—the entire surfaces of your feet—hard through the deck. Obviously, there will be no movement, but stick with the intent. You will notice that tension will increase throughout the body as you focus on this “static stomp”. Keep at it for 10-20sec.

Shake off the tension with shadow kickboxing or similar “fast and loose” movements, rest a minute, then pull a moderately heavy deadlift. You will be pleasantly surprised that your pull is very strong and steady, without hitches, and you are using all your muscles from start to finish.

Alternate static stomp iso deads with regular pulls. Practice relaxation drills in between: shake the tension off your limbs like a boxer before a round.

The bottom line on fighting the knee leakage is: **keep pushing your feet through the platform all the way to the lockout.**

Tight hip flexors are another cause for hitching. The glutes fail to extend the hips all the way, so in order to assume a somewhat upright posture, the deadlifter rebends his knees and hyperextends his back. The RKC hip flexor stretch should fix this problem.

## • Hips

Your butt shooting up at the beginning of the pull is hip leakage.

Consider the mechanism of cheating on a lift. The nervous system suddenly has doubts about the muscles having enough strength to complete the movement as planned and it quickly switches to plan b—the path of least resistance. An inexperienced lifter pushes hard with his legs but the barbell hardly moves. He panics and lets his tail shoot up because it gives him better leverage—at least for the moment. As with all panicked decisions, this one is very short sighted. While it may be easier to move the bar at that particular spot, the lift will be nearly impossible to lock out and dangerous to boot, forcing the back to flex and do most of the work. But it seemed like a good idea at the time...

An experienced lifter, on the other hand, will keep grinding it out straight and narrow, no matter how hard it feels, without taking what seems like an easier detour. He has faith in his strength and stays in the groove, no matter how hard it is. That is the hallmark of a strength professional.

A technique which will help you develop this skill is the “wedge”. Every elite lifter uses it, whether he realizes it or not.



Load up two bars: one with a weight you absolutely will not be able to budge (it is fortunate that Andy does not need to do this drill) and the other with a weight you can comfortably pick up ten times. Ideally, use a whippy deadlift or Olympic weightlifting bar. The amount of bend in the bar will provide you with useful and motivating feedback.

Walk up to the "welded" bar, set up, inhale, tense up, and pull yourself down.

Grip the bar and smoothly build up the pressure with your feet over a period of several seconds. Push through the floor! Drive your hips forward (they will not go anywhere; it is an intention, not an action). Do not let your knees slip forward. Maintain this effort, not maximal but fairly intense, for 5-10sec. This is a long time, which is why you should not hold your breath as you do in a dynamic deadlift. Breathe shallow while staying tight; short hisses will do.



**Walk up to the  
"welded" bar, set  
up, inhale, tense  
up, and pull  
yourself down.**

When you are done, release the tension over a period of a couple of seconds; doing it suddenly hurts.

If you do this drill correctly, the bar will bend and your body will tense as a rock but not move. Your lower back will stay arched, your tail will not shoot up, your knees will not slide forward, your elbows will not bend. You will quite literally get “wedged” between the bar and the platform. It is a very strong and solid feeling. Practice until you get it with several minutes of rest between your isometric sets. If you did not hit it after three sets, continue another day. Iso pulls are a strong medicine, to be taken in moderation.

Here is a tip from Louie Simmons, which will help you develop a perfect wedge. “In the deadlift, get tension in the hands and hams/glutes. If you feel tension only in the hands, you are about to lift only with your back; if in your lower body, it means you are trying to squat the weight.”

When you have succeeded in hitting a perfect wedge, rest for a minute and apply it to the bar with your 10RM. The bar will bend a hair, “levitate”, then blast off. Do a dead stop triple, patiently “wedging” yourself before every take-off.

When you have nailed the wedge technique, the bar “lifts itself”. Tom Klundby, RKC, got the wedge down pat, then made a mistake of opening too light in a meet. He performed a wedge as a part of his setup—and the bar came off the platform before he was ready. He readjusted and stood up with an easy lift—only to get red lighted. Rules specify that, once the bar came off the platform, it counts as an attempt—and you only get one at a time.

The wedge drill should address the several reasons your hips might shoot up and “leak” strength: weak glutes, a poor starting position, rushing the lift, and lacking confidence.

The following very subtle technique used—often unconsciously—by many elite lifters, especially big boys, will help you start the pull strongly and without letting your hips ride up. Explains the late Dr. Mel Siff:

*Something that no clinicians or scientists have yet examined is a little-known very crafty and very useful facilitation process that experienced weightlifters and powerlifters use to help themselves rise from the lowest position in the clean, deadlift and squat—namely the tensing or bouncing of the lower abs against the upper thighs. Not only does this contact between the adjacent muscle regions enhance stability and pre-stretch, but it can also offer hydraulic or elastic contact recoil during the crucial beginning stage of any lift where one has to produce great starting strength under isometric conditions. This invaluable aid to lifting efficiency is lost if you make any attempt to “draw in your abs” or exhale, so, if you are attempting to lift maximal or very heavy loads in the Olympic style lifts, the deadlift, or the squat, avoid any tendency to utilize this type of well-meant, but potentially dangerous advice...*



To put it simply, get a snug contact between your upper thighs (rectus femoris) and lower abdomen. Brace your waist hard. Then, as you are starting the pull (or driving out of the bottom of the squat), push your belly off your thighs to get the initial hip extension going. Needless to say, it will not work if you have a girlish waist. Drive with your glutes at the same time.

There must be several reasons this technique is so powerful. First, it "shortens" the spine and the femurs and improves the leverage. Think about it: the spot where the thighs and the belly come in contact becomes your new "hip joint"—at least for the first inch of the movement.

Second, there is the "pneumo-elastic recoil" Siff mentioned. The belly literally pushes off your thighs—the same way a lazy or weak person pushes off his thighs with his hands when he is getting up from a chair.

The reason this technique ended up in this particular section is, it encourages one—in addition to its other benefits—to initiate the lift with hip extension, which, by definition, is the opposite of letting the butt shoot up (the knees extend while the hips do not budge).

This is very subtle stuff, do not be frustrated if it takes you a long time to get it. A good practice would be budging your deads one inch or so—using mostly this mechanism and the glutes. It feels awesome.

## • Lumbar spine

If your lower back starts rounding as the bar leaves the ground, you are leaking strength. According to studies of Olympic weightlifters by Vorobyev (1972), the strength at the start of the pull is 8.3% greater than when the lower back is arched. The head coach of the IPF Powerlifting Team Russia, Boris Sheyko explains that this arching increases the stiffness of the torso and provides a more complete transfer of the athlete's leg strength to the barbell.

An obvious cause of this type of leakage is back and/or midsection weakness.

The second cause is the lack of skill of locking a neutral spine and bracing. A back puller may have a manly set of "poles", as Russian men of iron call the spinal erectors, yet use them dynamically rather than statically. Practice your RKC planks and think of your deadlift as a "moving plank" (a tip of the hat to Dan John, Master RKC).

And experiment with the following DL variations recommended by world champion S. Glyadya and Prof. M. Starov from the Ukraine. Setting the arch and the brace are only two of the many benefits these great drills offer.

**1) Slow DL.**

Vary the speed:

- a. 3sec up, 3sec down
- b. 5sec up, 5sec down
- c. 10sec up, 10sec down

**2) DL with stops.**

The Ukrainians recommend 3-4 stops for 2-5sec at each of the following levels:

- a. 1-2" (2-5cm) from platform
- b. Slightly below knees
- c. Slightly above knees
- d. At the lockout

You may pause only on the concentric, only on the eccentric, or on both halves of the lift. Never do more than three reps per set. The drill's benefits go far beyond fixing the back leakage. "Not only will this exercise help you finesse your technique," promise the Ukrainian specialists, "You will learn to make it through the sticking point and stay with the weight if the bar is "stuck".

**3) DL to the knees, preferably standing on box.**

Pause at the knees for 3-5sec.

**4) Isometric DL at the sticking point.**

Do these after your regular deadlifts and use no straps. Some loading parameters to choose from:

- a. 3sec/5 sets
- b. 5sec/3 sets
- c. 10sec/1 set

Not anchoring your lift off with a hip flexor "pinch" is one of the reasons you may be having a problem holding your arch. Review the "Pulling yourself down to the bar" section in the very beginning of this book.

## • Thoracic spine

You may start the pull with your upper back somewhat rounded. The more flexed it is, the easier it is to start the pull—and the harder to finish it.

Regardless of how much thoracic spine flexion you start with, it may not increase any more once the bar gets moving. If your upper back bends towards the end of the pull, a proven remedial drill is a partial deadlift. Boris Sheyko recommends pulling from slightly below the kneecaps. Obviously, you must not go so heavy that your upper back caves in, or you would be defeating the purpose of the exercise. Konstantin Konstantinov, who practices extreme upper back flexion, uses deads with bands to strengthen his finish.



Renowned spine biomechanist, Stuart McGill, PhD, has designed an innovative exercise which will hit all your upper back weak spots with laser-like precision. Lie face down on a flat or incline bench, the part of your torso above the sternum hanging off. If the bench is flat, someone will need to hold your feet down. Hold a weight in one hand. Let your spine slightly flex and rotate as you lower the bell a few inches. Then pull back and bring your spine back to neutral. Don't shrug up and don't hyperextend.

Switch hands and repeat. Then slide up higher on the bench so more of your torso is off the bench and repeat. McGill recommends seven to eight levels to hit all the back extensor motor units. "Loads in the hands are typically not large initially since the objective is to focus on the ability to sense the different section of the muscle and activate them—mental imagery is most important here."

"The moving fulcrum during back extensor exercise is a philosophical approach to train different motor units within the muscle... the fulcrum is systematically moved along the torso, slightly changing the mechanical demands with each positional change. This systematically challenges each section of the extensor motor unit pool." The scientist insists that you focus on feeling the right muscles. "Imagery enhances the activation of every available motor unit."

You may have to put a short stiff pad on top of the bench if the latter does not allow you to comfortably hang off the edge. Or lie on a gym ball with your feet hooked under a stationary object.

## • Scapulae

An obvious beginner mistake is starting the pull with the shoulders shrugged up and/or back which causes a leak in the scapulae.

Another cause is failing to take the slack out of the bar with your lats, or doing it incorrectly. By "incorrectly" I mean recruiting your "wings" as you would use them in a bent over row. The correct way is similar to the gymnastics front lever or the straight-arm pulldown. The lats should contract as a unit with the serratus anterior and the obliques, "closing" your sides. Your shoulders "antishrug" towards your pelvis.

Although a maximally protracted position would shorten the stroke, it would prevent you from getting your shoulders back at the top. So you will need to individualize the degree of scapular protraction.

The best lat loading technique that I have come across I learned from Mark Reifkind, Master RKC. Set your lower back arch and brace with your knees slightly flexed as you are standing over the bar. Take your air in and descend with tension. Reach the bar with difficulty, as if fighting the resistance of very tight gear. This will make you stretch your shoulders down and prevent you from dropping the hips too low. Set your grip one hand at a time. How you do it is the key.

As you have gripped the knurling—your arm and shoulder taut, your body fighting to get down against the resistance of the real or imaginary suit, groove briefs, and knee wraps—hiss out a little air. Stick your tongue between your teeth, contract your abs and the obliques on the side you are setting your grip on, and hiss out a little air under high pressure.

If you do all of the above correctly, your lat will lock in so strongly that the bar will noticeably bend (the technique is best practiced with a whippy deadlift or weightlifting bar). Your waist will also be perfectly braced. Still “having difficulties getting down”, barely reach the bar with your other hand and repeat the process. Now drop your hips to the appropriate depth and hit it!

The technique is worth patiently practicing to get it right as it delivers great tightness, linkage, and leverage.

### • **Elbows**

If you start the lift with your elbows flexed, the weight will soon straighten them out for you. Care for biceps tendon reattachment surgery?

Lock your elbows and cramp your triceps as you are descending to the bar and keep them that way.

Picking a higher focal point at the start of the pull—straight ahead rather than on the ground 6-10 feet in front of you—may be in order, if you just cannot help curling your deadlifts.

### • **Wrists**

Goosenecking your wrists when setting your grip could be a problem. RDC says: “If the hands are rotated as you grip the bar, it most likely will slip out as the weight pulls down, and pulls the rotated hands (flexed wrists) back to a straight up and down position.” So don’t do it.

### • **Fingers**

The bar rolling down towards your fingertips is finger leakage. Andy will show you how to deal with it.



# Deadlift and Squat Assistance exercises



he beginner needs to master deadlift form.

To do this he needs to understand what good form is, and then drill it over and over again until it becomes automatic.

The beginner does not need too much variety.

However, there may come a point in time where your form is excellent but simple training cycles involving sets of 3 and 5 reps are no longer getting you any stronger. In the iron game we call this a plateau.

The question is, how do you overcome a plateau?

Well, the first thing you don't do is to do the same things over and over again and expect a different result. That was Einstein's definition of insanity.

So, in that case, you have to do something different.

Now, let's say that you are weak at lockout.

You could try partials.

If you are weak off the floor, you could try pulling through an extended range of motion.

## **Partial:**

I like to do these from various heights below the knee.

I think training them above the knee is an ego stroke and a fast way to overtrain and/or get injured.

So keep your partials between 2 inches off the floor and the bottom of your knee cap.

They can be done off mats, blocks, or the pins in the power rack. I prefer mats or blocks for two reasons:

1. You don't bend your bar (an expensive habit if you end up doing a lot of partials).
2. You get the proper bar flex off the blocks or mats (whereas you don't off the power rack pins).

If you do start to use partials, don't make the mistake of never training your pull from the floor because you'll end up very strong at lockout and weak off the floor.

Find a balance between partials and full range of motion.

## **Deficit pulls:**

I've never used these because I've always been strong off the floor, but they are a very valid movement if you need more starting strength.

I would favor a 1 or 2 inch deficit as I've yet to see anyone deadlift with good form while standing on more than a 2 inch block.

The primary muscle groups responsible for lifting massive numbers on the squat and deadlift are the same. These muscle groups are the hamstrings, glutes and lower back.

For this reason, the squat and deadlift assistance exercises are mostly the same.

However, there are two notable exceptions: upper back work and grip work.

Grip work is irrelevant for the squat and I consider the upper back work mostly for the deadlift, although of course it plays some role in helping both the squat and bench press too.

Let's first look at the squat and deadlift assistance exercises:



## Leg press:

Trained on a Wednesday, after squatting and deadlifting.

I put it here in my weekly training plan because my legs are already warmed up after the heavy barbell lifts that precede it.

The leg press allows me to train the quads, glutes, and hamstrings in a bodybuilding fashion. All of my squat and deadlift work is 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 reps. Therefore, I train the leg press with more moderate weights and sets of 10 to 15 reps.

This allows me to build some size in my legs, which I feel helps to ultimately make me stronger.

So Wednesday looks like this:

**Squat**—heavy strength training (low reps, longer rest periods)

**Deadlift**—heavy strength training (low reps, longer rest periods)

**Leg press**—bodybuilding training (moderate weight, short rest periods of around 60 to 90 seconds)

## Lying leg curls:

I train these on a Saturday, in my assistance workout.

The lying leg curl trains the hamstrings.

I usually go 3 to 4 sets of 10 to 20 reps to build some size and tendon and ligament strength in the backs of the thighs. The hamstrings are incredibly important for both the squat and deadlift, so this is an important movement for me.

Rest periods are kept short—around 60 seconds.

## Kettlebell swings:

Again trained on Saturday.

The swings hit the hamstrings, glutes, and lower back hard, and also help to develop incredible core strength and a powerful hip drive.

If you want to be stable on your squats and snappy at the top of your deadlifts, these are a great movement to include in your workout.

Sets of 5 to 10 reps work well.

Remember that the swing is not a squat/front raise combo (even though this is how 90% of people butcher the movement).

It's really a lean over with fairly straight legs and then a powerful hip drive. Keep the 'bell close to your balls on the way down and allow the power from your hips to project the 'bell to different heights.

If you feel it in your shoulders, you are doing it wrong.

You should feel it in the hammies, glutes, and lower back.

### **Seated calf raises:**

Again, trained in the Saturday workout, I do these seated to avoid any more loading of the spine.

I do 3 sets of 10 to 20 reps, just to work the calves. I am not setting any records on this movement.

Core work:

My core is trained on a Saturday. I usually pick two or three movements and do a few sets.

Here are some of my 'go-to' core movements...

- RKC plank (2 or 3 sets of 10 second holds)
- Crunch, various foot positions (2 or 3 sets of 10 to 30 reps)
- DB side bends (2 or 3 sets of 6 to 10 reps/side)

### **Upper back work:**

I usually either train my upper back on Thursday (after squatting and deadlifting the day before) or on Saturday.

The upper back is trained in a bodybuilding fashion. I will talk about it in great detail later.

### **Grip work:**

Once I pulled in excess of 950lbs, grip became an issue.

You may never need to train your grip!



But if you do, I'll warn you now, if you ask fifty world champions how to train the grip, you will get fifty different answers.

What I can say is that I worked up from 950lbs to 1,008lbs, so I must have done some things right.

Here are the grip exercises that I felt best helped my deadlift:

## **Shrugs:**

These can be done with a full grip or a false (thumbless grip) but never with straps because that would defeat the purpose.

I like to go heavy on these and usually pyramid up to a top set of between 3 and 8 reps. I'll usually do 3 to 5 sets in total.

For example:

100kg x 3, 140kg x 3, 180kg x 3, 220kg x 3, 250kg x 3

## **Pinch gripping:**

These can be done many ways:

Single arm or both together.

With and without chalk.

For reps.

For time.

With different thicknesses or plates.

Pinch gripping really helps strengthen the thumb and I found my best results came when I varied what I did quite a lot...

One week go moderately heavy for sets of 5.

Next week go to a max single.

The week after, go to a max 10 second hold.

## **Fat bar work:**

The fat bar really makes the regular bar seem like a toy when you come back to using it.

The fat bar can be used for full deadlifts (although I don't like this), partial deadlifts (I like this) or just moved an inch or two in a power rack and then held for time.

Whatever variation you choose you can either hold for time, or do reps.

If holding for time, don't go higher than 20 seconds because it ends up building endurance and not strength.

One of my training partners held 100kg for 60 seconds and I had to give it everything to do 61 seconds. And I mean everything —my arms and hands were sore for the next 2 days. At the time he weighed 90kg and could pull 260kg.

I weighed 160kg and could pull 1,008lbs.

That day I realized that anything over 20 seconds and maybe even 10 seconds was a waste of time for improving grip strength on the deadlift.



# The Kettlebell Swing— A Killer Deadlift Assistance Exercise



eteran powerlifter Ron Fernando wrote in *Powerlifting USA*:

*[Legendary old time strongman Herman Goerner's] prodigious back and grip strength was in part developed from the consistent use of kettlebells. The use of kettlebells as a deadlift builder has been confirmed by Donnie Thompson, [RKC], current holder of the all-time World Superheavyweight total. Witness a quote from Donnie from Pavel Tsatsouline's Dragon Door website: "We honestly have not seen anything that 100% transferred over to a sport like kettlebells. I mean, there is nothing about kettlebells that doesn't transfer over to powerlifting." This is a statement Hermann Goerner proved over and over again almost 100 years ago.*



A while ago, struck by the similarity of Andy Borton's DL to the kettlebell swing, I asked the champion, "Correct me if I am wrong, it seems that you try to keep your shins vertical, don't think about the leg drive, and snap your hips forward right from the start?" The deadlift master replied, "Yes, you got it, that's the way I do it. The hips go forward as soon as possible and as fast as possible and I don't really think too much about the legs, they do their stuff without me thinking."

The kettlebell swing is one of the best deadlift assistance exercises one can do. It develops a hard driving lockout and bulletproofs the back. Donnie Thompson, RKC, was undoubtedly the first elite powerlifter using the swing for this purpose. He credited kettlebells with taking his pull from 766 to 832—and saying farewell to his persistent back problems.

How do swings build up the DL? "By working the deadlift muscles without killing them," suggested Mr. Haney, RKC, Donnie's coach.

"Unlike the plyometrics that are so fast that they mostly rely on the elastic rebound, kettlebell swings are slow enough to work the muscles," said Louie Simmons.

Another elite puller who fixed his back with kettlebell swings while getting stronger is Brad Gillingham: "I started incorporating kettlebell swings into my training after suffering a back injury two years ago... After several frustrating rehabilitation attempts, I incorporated kettlebell swings and was able to compete within a couple of months... Further, I have found this movement to be beneficial in increasing my hip extension strength."





Here is the whole story:

*Pavel,*

*I tore an erector where it attaches to the Iliac in November. Really have had a hard time training. The injury feels like it has almost healed. My glute and back muscle all tightened up around the injury. I have had countless massage, chiro and also acupuncture treatments. These have all helped. I was going to drop out of the Arnold deadlift but then I got smart and bought some kettlebells. I should have done this years ago. I have been doing kettlebell swings for about a month. I... bought the 24kg and the next week bought the 40kg. These have helped tremendously and I have been able to get some pulling in this past month... I have been doing 3 sets of 10 with the 24 kg before training and I finish my training with 2-3 sets of 20 with the 40kg. This is a workout! I am going to get the 48kg next after the Arnold... My squat feels so much better and my back is getting thicker along with hammies and glutes. Tremendous exercise!*

*Brad*

The swing is a ballistic exercise. Forces generated during it can be surprisingly high. Brandon Hetzler, an RKC from the University of Missouri, had me step on a force plate and swing a 53-pound kettlebell. The force generated exceeded 500 pounds. This might give you a hint why someone as crazy strong as Donnie or Brad can improve their deads by swinging such light weights.

To do the swing, assume a sumo stance with the kettlebell a couple of feet in front of you to preload your posterior chain. Take a hold of the handle with one or both hands. Unlike in deads, there is no need to crush grip the handle; rather hook it with your fingers. Aggressively hike pass the bell back between the legs. Explosively stand up. Your hips, like a stretched bow, will launch the kettlebell straight forward to your chest level. That was the swing in a nutshell.

A word about safety.

Train barefoot or in minimalist shoes that make you feel like you are barefoot.

If you make a mistake and the kettlebell pulls you forward, making your heels come up—drop it.

Once you are sucking wind, walk around until your heart rate comes down some.

Here is your step-by-step swing progression.

## ***Towel swing***

Many beginners turn the swing into a front raise, which it most definitely is not. The arms are only there for the ride, straight and loose ropes transmitting the force. The towel swing will drive this point home, while also teaching you the perfect timing.

Thread a lifting strap, a piece of rope, or a short towel through the kettlebell's handle. Use a light kettlebell, e.g. a 16kg for a guy of an average size and strength. The towel will make it feel a lot "heavier". If you do not have anything lighter than a 24kg, towel swing it very low, about groin height.

Grip the towel very close to the handle. Back up a little and assume the "shortstop" or "athletic" stance familiar to you from your sumo kettlebell deadlift practice.

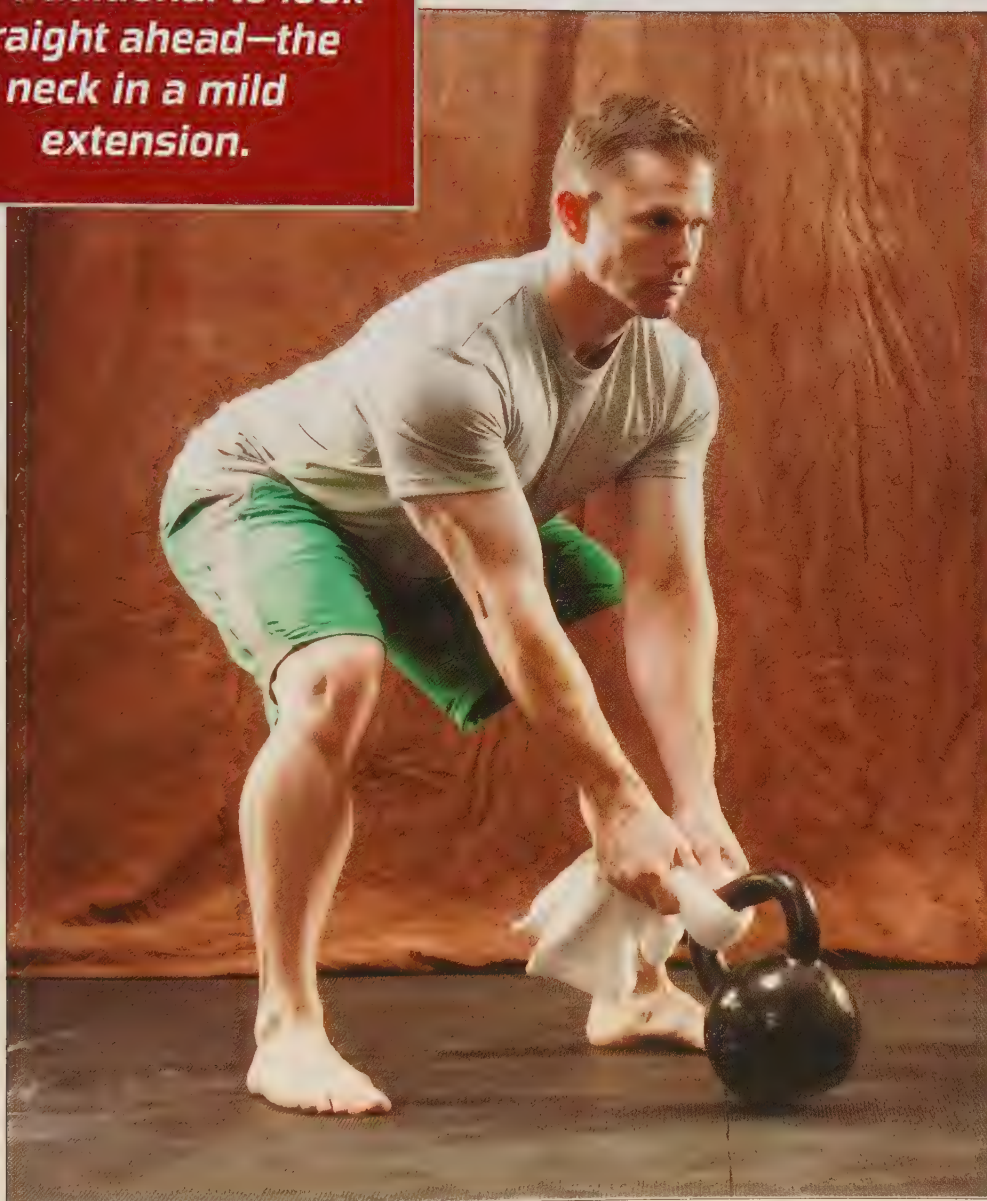
***Back up a little  
and assume the  
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"athletic" stance.***



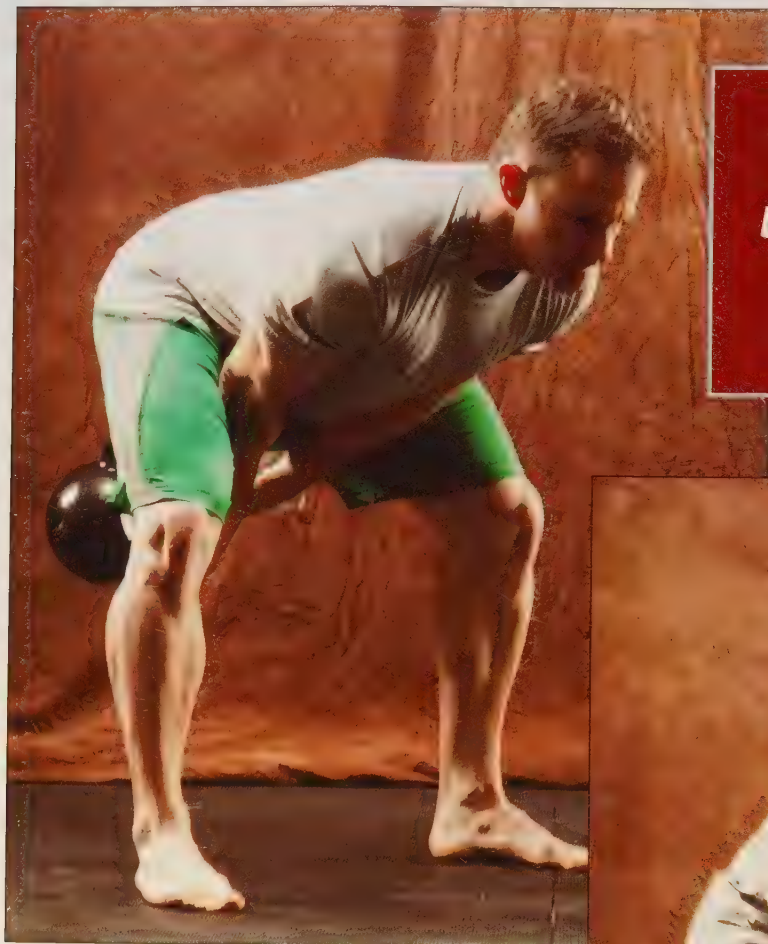


It is traditional to look straight ahead, which means your neck is in a mild extension in the bottom position. But keeping your neck neutral as a continuation of the spine and not moving it at all, as Andy does when he deadlifts, is another option (look at a spot 6-10 feet in front of you on the bottom of the pull, look forward on the top). Pick what is more comfortable.

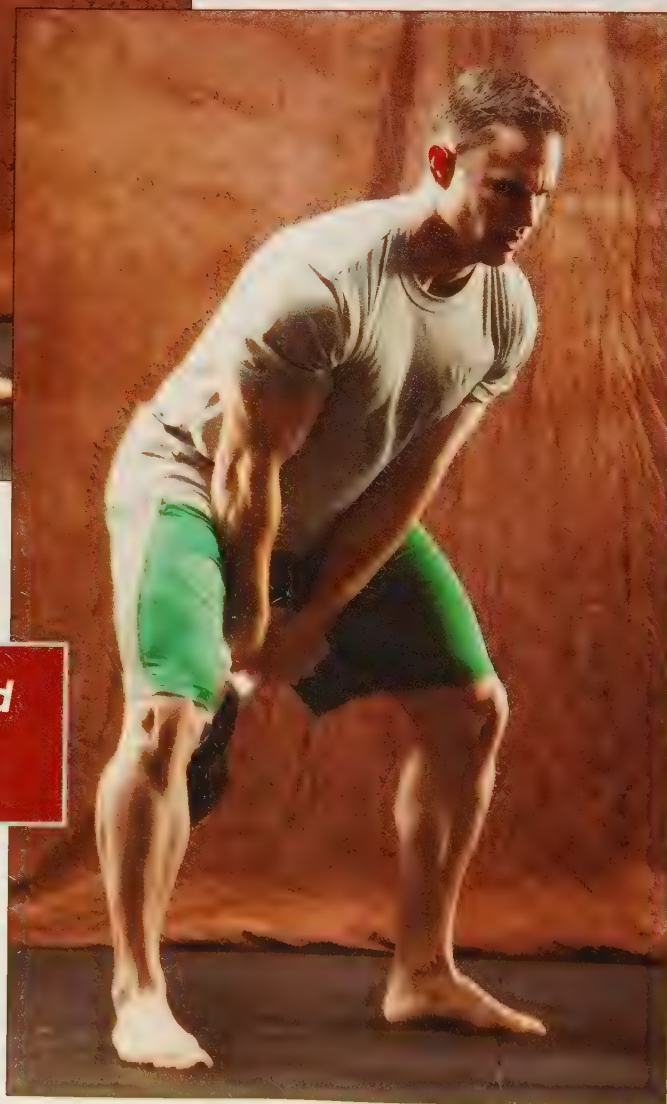
***It is traditional to look straight ahead—the neck in a mild extension.***



Shift your weight to your heels, take a breath, and throw the kettlebell back between your legs. Aim high: at the top of the backswing your forearms should hit your upper inner thighs and your upper arms must be snug against your ribs. At this moment quickly extend your hips and stand up "at attention". The movement is identical to Andy Bolton's deadlift.



*Shift your weight to your heels, take a breath, and throw the kettlebell back between your legs.*



*Quickly extend your hips.*





*Stand up "at  
attention".  
The movement is  
identical to Andy  
Bolton's deadlift.*

"Standing straight" does not mean "leaning back"—the same is true for the dead.

Explosively cramp your glutes as if crushing a walnut. Lock your knees. The "pull your kneecaps up" cue allows one to forcefully lock the knees without hyperextending them.

Keep your arms straight and relaxed. Your hip drive will launch the kettlebell in front of you. You are doing it right if it tops out somewhere between your groin and chest height. Do not try to swing it higher! "The swing is an exercise in projecting the energy forward," stresses Brett Jones, Master RKC.

Keeping your glutes contracted and your legs and body straight (you are doing a standing plank), let the kettlebell pendulum back guiding it with your lats (eventually you may actively accelerate it for greater ballistic loading). When your forearms are about to hit you around the groin, quickly hinge through your hips to get out of the way. Explosively stand up again.



Throughout the set—even when you have already put the kettlebell down—there should be no movement of your spine whatsoever. It is all in the hips. For now keep your weight on your heels.

Don't hold your breath. I am not going to tell you how to breathe at this point of the game; just breathe.

Set the kettlebell on the ground without unloading your heels and without losing your neutral spine. Remember: until the kettlebell is safely parked, the set is not over!

If your technique is correct, the towel will stretch and, together with the kettlebell, will form an extension of your arms. And if you lift with your arms instead of projecting with your hips, the bell will droop or spin and the towel will snap. The towel will exaggerate your mistakes, provide you with obvious feedback, and teach you how to swing right—in minutes.





Stop after ten reps or so. Rest briefly and do another set, this time calling out the number of each rep on the top. You are starting to pick up good breathing habits.

Then work on your timing. You will soon notice that there is a time lag between the driving force of the hips and the kettlebell's flight—like in a punch. The towel reveals this important subtlety of the swing. Keep swinging, and pay attention to the timing of your efforts. Try to make the kettlebell hover weightless for a moment at the apex.

Drive your hips explosively, but don't rush the kettlebell. The longer your upper arms stay in contact with your ribs, the better. Let the kettlebell catch up as your hip drive goes up your body like a wave. Hurrying the kettlebell is like punching with the arm—ineffective.

Do you have two straight lines on the top of your towel swing?

\_\_\_\_\_ Your arms—the towel—the kettlebell \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Your legs—your upper body—your head \_\_\_\_\_

Once you have succeeded in making these two straight lines, you are ready for the classic swing.

## Two-arm swing



Stand a foot or so behind your kettlebell, sit back, and take a hold of the handle with both hands. Grip the handle lightly with both hands—barely hook it with your fingers. A tight grip tightens up the arms and does not allow one to swing explosively.

While keeping your weight on your heels—important!—hike pass the kettlebell behind you, fairly close to your groin. Drive the hips through and start swinging.



Snap your hips forward—without letting your knees slip forward. Think of your shins as the guns shooting your hip power straight down into the deck. As you should during your deadlifts.

Keep your arms “connected” to your torso through your lats, not your shoulders. Do not let your shoulders roll forward on the top of the swing; pull your scapulae back some as you would when locking out a deadlift.

When you are done with your set, pay attention to how you park the kettlebell. Following the backswing, let the bell passively pendulum forward slightly and set it down between your feet. Don’t round your back or roll forward on your toes. Don’t relax until the bell is safely parked.

If you are one big dude, two-handed swings might be awkward, as they would force your chest to collapse and your upper back to round. If that is the case, stay with towel swings and later move on to one-arm swings and double kettlebell swings.



**Don’t  
round your  
back or roll  
forward on  
your toes.**



## ***"Breathing into the groin"***

The breathing technique you are about to learn will not only improve your swing, it will make your deadlift stronger, and your back safer.

Bob Peoples had to be one of the first deadlift masters to notice that breathing into the chest made his back longer and his pull harder. He realized that breathing into his belly was the ticket.

Development of diaphragmatic breath does not have to be a tedious contemplation of your navel for hours. Meditation has its benefits but activating your diaphragm is not high on that list. I will teach you a technique I was taught in a Russian special forces' dive school. It accomplished three goals. The first two you might not care about—a more economical use of the air from your scuba tank and a greater breath holding time for free diving. But the third benefit—a tremendous activation of the diaphragm and an instant understanding of what karate great Mas Oyama meant by "breathing into your groin"—is right down your alley. Even if you are already good at diaphragmatic breathing, the straw breathing drill will make you even better.

Lie on your back and pinch off your nose. Preferably with a diver's nose clip, but your fingers will do. Just make a point to arrange your arm in a way that minimizes its fatigue.

Stick a drinking straw in your mouth and breathe. That's it. Once you have done it comfortably for a few minutes, replace the straw with a double length straw you have prepared in advance by taping two straws together lengthwise with sticky office tape. You might start running out of breath but don't panic. You will quickly learn that the only way you can make it is by making very long, deep, and complete inhalations and exhalations.



You may have heard that it is impossible to breathe through a snorkel that is too long. Air gets trapped in it and you just end up breathing the same air up and down. Two or three straws put you almost in the same situation. Almost, but not quite. You will be able to breathe—but only if your inhalations are low and deep enough and your exhalations are complete enough.

Once you have finished ten minutes of straw breathing you will stand up with a clear head and the breath of a monk. Try to make a good use of it on the lifting platform.

Go ahead, apply what you have learned to your deadlift. Inhale into your groin and into your obliques through tightly pursed lips. Just stop before you start filling up your chest. Your dead will be stronger and more solid.





## *Hardstyle breathing*

Apply the same style of inhalation to your kettlebell back swing—only breathe in through your nose. Sniff in sharply.

On the top of the swing make an explosive “TSSA!”—as a karateka breaking a board.



“Kettlebell swings work the abs well,” observed Louie Simmons. This type of martial breathing is one of the reasons why.

Do not blow out all of your air—not even half of it. Losing your air would make your back vulnerable. Do not allow your neck to jut forward when you contract your abs on exhalation. If you have this problem, practice Hardstyle breathing standing with your back against the wall.

Take your next abdominal inhalation when the kettlebell is about to hit the bottom of the rep. A sharp snort in through your nose.

## *Dead swing*

This swing variation from the evil intelligence of Mark Reifkind, Master RKC, is perfect for powerlifters as it forces you to do one rep at a time. This will make the swing harder, it will also allow you to polish your technique. The word "dead" refers to a dead weight. Incidentally, the deadlift used to be called the "dead weight lift".

Start as usual. After the first rep let the kettlebell swing behind you, as if loading up for another rep. But do not straighten out and stay down instead. The kettlebell will naturally pendulum forward. Let it come down to the ground in front of you, at the same place it was before the set. Shift your weight way back to your heels at the same time. Repeat for sets of 5-10 back to back singles. Use your lats to hike the bell back aggressively every time.







**Use your lats to  
hike the bell  
back  
aggressively  
every time.**

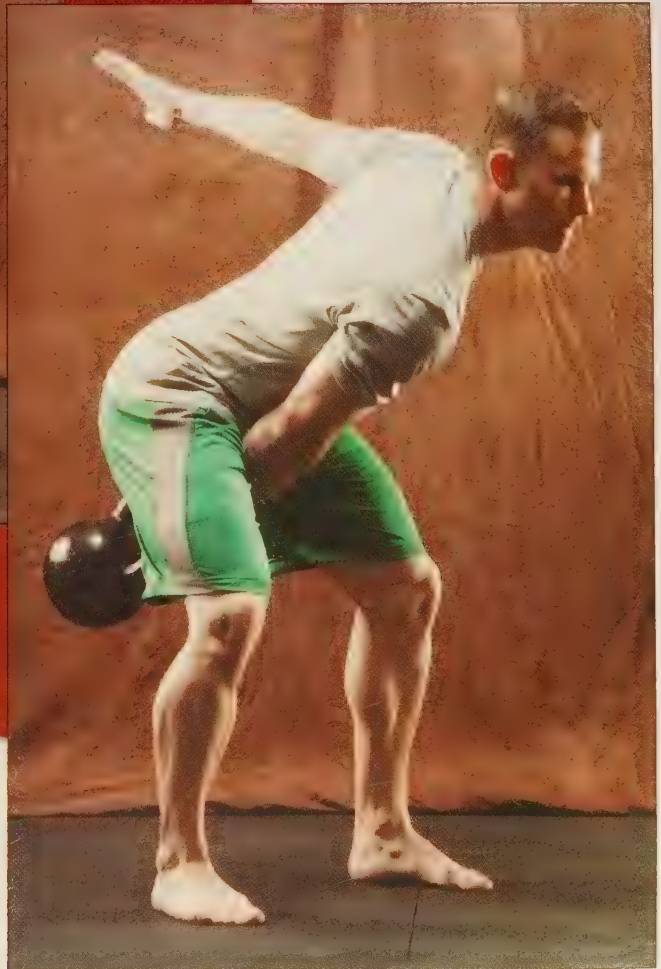




## One-arm swing

Measurements taken at Prof. McGill's lab have shown that many muscles, e.g. the lats, the glutes, and the obliques, work harder when you swing the same kettlebell with one arm.

The groove on the one-arm swing is not any different from that of its two-arm brother. Only the one-armeder tends to twist the body and tempt the shoulder to come out of its socket. Make an effort to keep your shoulders square and pull your shoulder in as a turtle would pull in its head on the top of each swing.



## *Hand-to-hand swing*

Once you are reasonably proficient in the one-arm swing, give the hand-to-hand version a shot—somewhere where you are not afraid to drop the bell.

Learn to “tame the arc” by pulling the kettlebell closer on the top of each swing using the shoulder rather than the biceps. Your elbow will bend somewhat, but this should be just the result of the shoulder pulling (as is the case in professionally performed Olympic pulls).

Be careful not to reach forward for the kettlebell if it got away. Let it drop.

Maximally cramp the glutes and pop the hips to make the kettlebell “weightless” for a moment. Don’t rush down, let the bell float momentarily while keeping the glutes tight.



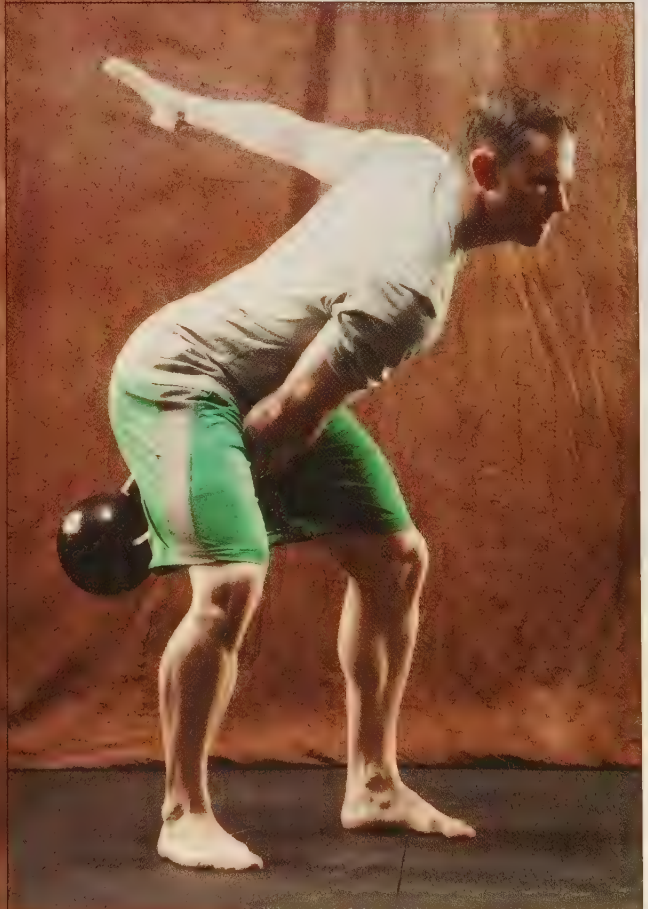
Hand-to-hand swings encourage a strong hip snap and reinforce the ballistic nature of the swing: “A contraction performed as fast as possible... a ballistic contraction... is characterized by a brief contraction time and high rate of force development that is followed rapidly by complete muscle relaxation.” (Van Cutsem & Duchateau)





The hips generate a shock wave and, as in a punch, in the swing there is a brief delay between the finish of the hip thrust and the moment the kettlebell reaches its apex, floating weightless. Otherwise it is a push and not a punch; a front raise and not a swing.

Listen to Donnie Thompson, RKC: "Come up with tremendous power to lockout. Don't play passive."



## *Side stepping swing*

Athletes like football players do it for an obvious reason. Why would a powerlifter bother? The barbell is not going to run away—use side stepping swings for the extra glute work.

Swing with both hands. On the top of the swing bring your left foot next to your right. When the wrecking ball is heading towards your knees, step to the right with your right and guide the kettlebell where it needs to go. Obviously, walk left on your next set.

Rehearse without a bell first.





## ***Double kettlebell swing***

Swinging two heavy kettlebells—32kg and all the way to the 48kg “Beasts”—will build tremendous hip power. The drill will not forgive any technical flaws. Rob Lawrence, as usual, was right on: “The double swing makes the theory real.” You need many months of single kettlebell swings before tackling doubles.

Set two kettlebells side by side, their handles in one line. You will need to make a few technique modifications for heavy doubles. First, take a slightly wider stance for your knees’ sake. Second, reduce the turnout of your feet: they should be pointing almost straight forward. If you have enough mobility, straight ahead would be ideal. Third, you will have to switch from what Russian kettlebell lifters call a “high stance” to a “low stance”.



If you weigh a buck eighty and you toss a pair of seventy-pounders far behind you and high, with your arms almost hitting you in the groin and your weight on your heels, you not be able to stay on your feet. It is not a matter of strength; it is a matter of physics. The common center of mass of your body and the kettlebells must be projected over your feet.

One obvious thing you could do is not hike the kettlebells as far back as you are used to. However, now you will have less distance over which you can accelerate the kettlebells. In pure strength events like powerlifting having a short stroke is an asset, which is why top powerlifters tend to be short for their weight class. Not so in power events like throws, which is why successful throwers are always tall. The kettlebell swing is a power event.



So how can we preserve our acceleration distance without throwing the kettlebells far back? By directing them more down. You will end up using your quads more.

Early in your kettlebell swinging career you were keeping your weight on your heels—to learn to use the posterior chain and keep you safe from tipping forward and overloading your back. As you are getting into heavier bells, physics will not allow you to do it any more. Now you need to learn to shift your weight over the center of your feet on the very bottom of the swing. Load the balls of your feet and your toes strongly—this will not only balance you out but will make your quads jump into the action—but without unloading your heels! You will have to let your knees move forward slightly, about half way to your toes. This will improve your quads' leverage and make the bottom half of the swing stronger.



On the top of the swing the game changes. The kettlebells are now in front of you and want to pull you forward. You will have to dig your heels in hard, as if you are playing tug of war. Make sure to pull your shoulders back to bring the bells a little closer towards you.

Whenever you are about to take on heavy doubles, start with dead swings and low swings and work your way up to your solar plexus level as you are gaining confidence in your balance. Also practice the static stomp deadlifts we taught you earlier.

Whereas in the single kettlebell swing you had your choice of looking straight ahead and keeping your neck in a mild extension on the bottom of the swing, with heavy doubles you would be better off emulating Andy's DL neck and eye technique. Do not move your neck at all. Look at a spot on the ground 6-10 feet in front of you in the bottom position and naturally let your eyes look forward on the top.

A very effective double swing variation has been proposed by Dan John, Master RKC. Use different size bells—and the more the difference, the better (e.g., 16kg + 32kg). But swing them in such a way that the bells move at the same rate, with the light one not outrunning the heavy one. Keep your hips and shoulders level and do not twist. It is an excellent challenge to your stabilizers and a smoker for the glutes.

## ***Peak power swing***

A point must be made that while you should strive to slowly build up to heavy double swings, never abandon very explosive swings with a single bell of approximately 30% of your bodyweight. According to the research by Brandon Hetzler, RKC, this is the sweet spot for max power production. This correlation holds for people of different strength, men and women alike.

## ***Overspeed eccentric swing***

Start swinging a light kettlebell. To give you an idea of how light is "light", we had Heath Evans of the New England Patriots, a 250+ pound man with a 550-600 pound raw squat, use a 24kg. The kettlebell's mass is of secondary importance in this type of training. The kinetic energy imparted to the bell on the way down by your training partner, a rubber band, or even your own muscles, is the key. Speaks Louie Simmons, "Increasing velocity has a much greater effect on kinetic energy than increasing mass."  $KE = mv^2/2$ . "Heavier weight will not add to the rebound phase as effectively as using an overspeed eccentric phase... When slowing down the eccentric motion, we are limiting the energy that can be stored in the muscles and tendons."

Hold the kettlebell with both hands—single-handed overspeed swings are harder to steer around the knees.

Now comes the interesting part. Let the bell hover at the apex of its flight, then drop about an inch. At this point forcefully pull the kettlebell back between your legs, close to your groin, to load up for the next rep. Use your lats and the long heads of the triceps to explosively “hike pass” the bell.

That was the simplest way to get an overspeed eccentric, by using your own antagonists. Jim Smith, RKC, and Jedd Johnson, RKC, have developed two more techniques, more involved but also more intense: with a Jump Stretch™ band and with a training partner.

A green band with a 24kg is enough for an intermediate powerlifter. Stand on the band with both feet and loop it around the handle so it looks like an “8”.



explosiveness,” comment the Diesel Crew members. “If the speed is compromised or slows in any way, stop the set. If speed cannot be achieved, lower the kettlebell weight.” And/or pick a thinner band.

Unfortunately, the band does not allow the kettlebell to hover, you have to get out of Dodge immediately. The partner version does not have that problem.

After a couple of reps or regular swings have your partner gently push the kettlebell back once it has reached the top of the swing, hovered, and dropped an inch. With each succeeding rep he should spike it progressively harder. Within reason, of course. A face plant is not going to make you faster or stronger.





With any of the above techniques the reps ought to be limited. It makes sense to apply Prof. Verkhoshansky's depth jumps guidelines—experienced athletes should not exceed 4x10. Once or twice a week. This is exactly what Donnie Thompson, RKC, the man who has posted the highest powerlifting total of all time, 3,000 pounds, does—four sets of ten spiked swings with a 48kg "Beast" once a week. Given his deadlift in the 800s a 106-pound kettlebell may qualify as "light". 2-3x5-8 are sufficient for less prepared athletes.



Since overspeed eccentric swings are related to depth jumps, the Russian breathing recommendations for plyometrics apply. From *Supertraining*: "Correct breathing is important during plyometric training. It is vital that the athlete holds the breath during the amortization and early propulsion phase to stabilize the body, offer pneumatic shock absorption and to increase the rebound force. Forced exhalation should accompany the remainder of the propulsion phase."



The benefits of overspeed eccentric kettlebell swings are not limited to jumping ability. The Diesel comrades report "improved performance with general strength exercises: back squats, front squats, glute ham raises, back extensions, deadlifts, lunges, step-ups, clean & jerks, odd-object lifting... with sport specific movements: running, jumping, agility, speed, kicks, punching, striking, landing mechanics, throws." Jim Smith added 50 pounds to his deadlift, taking it from 485 to 535, in two months of these "power bombs". This is what we call the "what the hell effect" in the kettlebell community.

"Be glad your opponents don't use kettlebells so you can crush them in the battle arena!" exclaims Donnie Thompson, RKC.

## Programming the Kettlebell Swing for Powerlifters

*By Mark Reifkind, Master RKC,  
Former Head Coach IPF Women's Powerlifting Team USA*

*The kettlebell swing, in all its variations, is probably the best assistance exercise for the squat and deadlift that no one uses. Perhaps it's just because it's new to the scene (although Mr. Bolton seems to have gotten the memo, as well as Donnie Thompson) but rank and file powerlifters would be more than wise to include this powerful tool in their training arsenal.*

*When I first started using kettlebells in 2001 I was still a competitive powerlifter. The second thing I noticed (the first was how much the swing reminded me of swinging on the horizontal bar in gymnastics) was how much the two-hand swing resembled my favorite squat assistance move, the power good morning.*

*Power good mornings simulate the start and finish of a power squat: the back is arched, the hips move to the rear and the shins stay vertical. One hinges until the back is about 45 degrees to the deck and then arches back up. The posterior chain drives the movement with little help from the quads. The swing looked to me like a very dynamic version of this heavy-duty assistance movement.*

*The kettlebell swing simulates the almost exact hinging pattern of the traditional deadlift but gets a variety of unique stimulations to boot: rapid eccentric loading, reversal strength, as well as muscle hypertrophy in the posterior chain, abs, and lats. Not bad for just one exercise, eh? In addition, you can use the one arm and hand-to-hand versions as well to increase lat involvement and lower back stability (crucial if one is lifting heavy loads regularly). These variations also hunt out and fix any asymmetries and strength deficits the bilateral deadlift might cover up.*

So how does one include the kettlebell swing into a power training program without taking away from the mainstays of the game, your squat and deadlift? You have to be careful, as the swing works the same primary muscles with huge acceleration produced forces—although little shock or stress on the joint structures.

You can do them as a warm-up to get the blood flowing and your explosiveness fired up. Or do them as a primary assistance move right after the squat or the dead. You can also do them as a “finisher” at the end of the session. Or on an “off” or variety GPP day (much like sled dragging).

What I am going to suggest is a method of using the conventional swing and a technique I developed called the Dead Swing to improve and compliment each of the competitive lifts.

In the following plan you will incorporate these swing variations after the power-lifts. You will use the dead swing after your squat workout, as the squat already incorporates eccentric loading. The dead stop swing takes each rep from a complete stop with no requirement to reduce the eccentric forces and then reverse them. Each rep is fresh and requires at least the same amount of power as the last to move the bell at the same speed to the same height. The two-hand version is the exercise of choice.

After deadlift training you will do classic ballistic swings to balance out the lack of eccentric loading in most deadlift protocols. The kettlebell swing of choice here is the one arm version. Not only does it require over 50% more lat activation than the two-arm version, it also has stabilization training built into the equation.

One arm swings are tough for most, requiring an entirely different level of strength and stability. They will compliment all the bilateral barbell work. As one arm is working, the opposite side is stabilizing the off center weight. This will greatly help you keep the deep spinal muscles that hold things together strong. As Pavel wrote a long time ago, “Take care of you back, you will miss it when it’s gone”. Truer words were never spoken.

Here is what the template looks like when applied to a traditional peaking cycle for an athlete weighing more than 90kg/198 pounds.



## Squat day

*Two-handed dead swings done after squats:*

*Weeks 1-2: 24kg x 5, 32kg x 5, 36kg x 5*

*Weeks 3-4: 24kg x 5, 32kg x 5, 36kg x 5, 40kg x 5*

*Weeks 5-6: 24kg x 5, 32kg x 5, 36kg x 5, 40kg x 5, 48kg x 5*

*Week 7: 24kg x 5, 40kg x 5, 48kg x 5*

*Consider how the swing progression fits the squat progression. In the beginning of the squat cycle the squat reps are higher (probably, fives) the weights lower, and the volume is medium to high. In the subsequent weeks the squat weights go up and the reps go down, and usually the power (bar speed) goes down as well. The dead swing loads go up slightly, the accelerative forces continue to keep you fast and powerful, and your starting strength high as well. You must really hike the bell back strongly on each and every rep and stand up as strongly and powerfully as possible on each and every rep to get the most out of dead swings. Really locking in the lats and hips at the start of each rep is crucial as well.*

## Deadlift day

*One-arm classic swings after the DL workout:*

*Weeks 1-2: 24kg x 8+8 (left + right), 32kg x 5+5/3 sets*

*Weeks 3-4: 24kg x 5+5, 32kg x 8+8/3*

*Weeks 5-6: 24kg x 5+5, 32 kg x 10+10/3*

*Week 7: 24kg x 10+10/4*

*The ballistic nature of classic swings counterbalances the lack of eccentric loading in the deadlift. The one arm version creates more lat involvement and spinal stabilization. And as the DL loads get heavier closer to meet time, and the deadlifts get slower and grind more, the swings stay crisp and powerful.*

*The swing volume increases over the weeks as your deadlift volume decreases. You may find that your need for glute-ham raises, cable pull-throughs and back raises is significantly diminished. These muscles are solidly worked in a natural movement pattern in the swing.*

*You can always alter the intensity of any swing by maximizing the acceleration aspects of the movement. Hiking the bell back harder creates an overspeed eccentric loading on the bell (and your body) just as a Jump Stretch band attached to the kettlebell's handle would.*

*If you're tough enough and need extra work you can do that by adding sets and reps with the 48kg "Beast" on dead swings.*

*The addition of the kettlebell swing will do nothing but positive things. I just wish I had had this incredible tool available to me during my power career.*



# Bigger Lifts Through Stronger Abs



if chuckles that with weak abs you will "fold like a melted cheese sandwich under a heavy SQ or DL".

Even if you do not end up in a hospital, you will lose your leverage and strength. A Russian study by Sokolov determined that you lose 13% of your pulling strength if your back is rounded.

At first blush it would seem that the back muscles should be the only ones responsible for sparing your spine from the fate of the cheese sandwich. After all, if we want to prevent flexion, why would we want to fire anything but the extensors?

However, the human body is a lot more complicated than that. Without going into the anatomy woods, visualize your torso as a box. Stack a bunch of 45-pound plates on top of it until it starts creaking. Now reinforce one of the walls ("the back") with extra boards and keep loading the top. The box will collapse. The reinforced back side will be alright; it is the front that will blow out. Congratulations, you have just given your box a hernia! This is the fate of lifters with strong erectors and weak abs.

Rebuild the box reinforcing all sides. Now you can pile heavy stuff on top without fear.

From the purely architectural point of view, having thicker walls on all four sides will make the structure stronger. "Don't leave any of the four sides of your waist out, or you'll regret it," warns Louie Simmons.

But we can make it stronger yet. Let us insert a heavy-duty balloon inside the box and inflate it. Can you imagine how much stronger your box will be now? Now visualize the same balloon blown up inside your belly. Think how much more weight will it take now to fold you over against the resistance of the balloon!

This "balloon" is something called intra-abdominal pressure (IAP). It is created by a joined effort of the many muscles of your waist (with the internal obliques being among the top players), including the top and the bottom of the "box"—the diaphragm and the pelvic floor. The former is a parachute shaped muscle separating your lungs and your guts. When it contracts, it pushes down like a plunger. When you have, pardon me, constipation, the efforts of this muscle are very apparent.

The job of the pelvic floor is to contain whatever is inside. It relaxes during a bowel movement and reflexively pulls up when you are straining to lift (your body fortunately knows the difference).

Not only does an increased IAP make your torso more rigid, it greatly increases your strength neurologically. Your body uses the IAP as the equivalent of the volume control on your stereo. It literally amplifies the intensity of the "nerve force" going to your muscles.

Which is why all of the top dogs of powerlifting have exceptionally strong abs. Some train them directly, others don't. Why the discrepancy?

On one hand, when you are lifting weights that are heavy enough, you cannot help make your midsection work hard and get stronger.

## **A pointless argument**

Some geeks like to argue that one cannot develop strong abs with squats and deads because EMG studies do not show that the muscles of the midsection, especially the rectus abdominis, or the "six-pack", fire enough in these exercises. Indeed, in weak, uncoordinated people—typical college subjects used in studies—they do not. The same may be said of neck development. Conley et al. (1997) set out to find out whether "conventional resistance exercises, which are likely to evoke isometric action of the neck, induce[d] generalized hypertrophy of the cervical muscle". After twelve weeks of squats, deadlifts, and other global exercises, the subjects, "active college students", failed to grow bigger necks. The researchers concluded that, "short-term resistance training does not provide a sufficient stimulus to evoke neck muscle hypertrophy unless specific neck exercises are performed". At this point one could misinterpret the scientists' restrained, professional conclusion and generalize that it is not possible to grow a bull neck without direct neck exercises. Yet the necks of thousands of



powerlifters would prove this hasty generalization wrong. I have met very few PLers who bothered with direct neck work, yet none had a pencil neck. Here is a photo of my seventy-five year old father with only a few years of lifting experience setting up to pull 365x5 beltless. The only time he does "direct" neck work is when he nods or shakes his head agreeing or disagreeing with my mother.



If you read the above summary of the study carefully, you cannot miss "active college students" and "short-term resistance training". Simply said, deadlifts with 225 do not generate enough muscular tension to stimulate neck hypertrophy and ab strength. Russian scientists discovered that while in low intensity movements most work is performed by the extremities, when the load is significant, the core muscles take over much of the work (Tochilov, 1946; Kosilov, 1948; Vinogradov, 1951). Get your poundages up and you will get your abs. In inimitable words of Marty Gallagher:

*In the big fat world of fitness, things keep getting ever more crazed. The general fitness clientele, to expropriate a musical analogy, are dazed and confused. I keep seeing wacky stuff on TV as personal trainers will do anything to differentiate themselves from other personal trainers...how about sitting on the infamous Swiss Ball, one leg extended as the other fights to maintain balance while pushing a tiny-weenie dumbbell overhead. The only thing missing is circus music and perhaps a mini-car circling the exercising trainee that suddenly stops as eight clowns pile out. Meanwhile a muscle-less "fitness expert" dramatically intones that doing the overhead dumbbell press (with a weight my 90-pound daughter could rep a dozen times) while fighting for balance "builds core strength." It seems that every crackpot exercise shown as of late builds that elusive core strength...gimme some core strength...gotta have that core strength...of course I've never met a person with a 300-pound deadlift that didn't have more core strength than any of these pencil-necked fitness experts who endlessly proclaim the mystical benefits of more core. These experts keep insisting and prescribing that their clients need more core strength; it's become the predictable mantra of the new age fitness world. Here's a flash bulletin: achieving a 150-pound pause squat taken below parallel for 10-reps will infuse more core strength than all the Swiss Ball sit-ups, presses and off-balanced dink-ass exercises combined. That's a natural fact: mathematically irrefutable and demonstrable.*

"What about abs?" an interviewer asked Ed Coan. The legend of the sport replied: "I don't do them that often because I very rarely even wear a belt... In the off season if you squat and dead without a belt your abs are going to get pretty strong... they'll get enough stimulation."

Especially if you make a point of keeping them tight. Dr. Franco Columbu told me that he hated abdominal exercises. So he just focused on contracting his abs hard in every strength exercise—even the bench press. "Every exercise was about my abs!" Not only did he win the Mr. Olympia title, but the "Best Abs" award as well. More importantly, he deadlifted over 700 pounds at a buck eighty.

Dr. Judd Biasiotto who squatted a world record 605 @ 132 in the minimal supportive gear of the early 1980s is on the other end of the spectrum from Coan and Columbu:

*Abdominal work was one thing I never cheated on. I worked my abdominals religiously. I wanted them as strong as possible to stabilize my lower back. I wasn't on a specific abdominal program; I just worked them every chance I got...when I got out of bed, before I went to bed, during TV commercials, whenever. I did sit-ups until I couldn't see straight. I probably had the strongest abdominals in the world. I am dead serious about that. I could easily pump out fifty reps with 200 pounds on the Nautilus Crunch Machine, and 100-pound bent-knee sit-ups were no problem. Believe it or not, my upper abdominals got almost as big as my pectorals. In retrospect, I am not sure if I over worked my abdominals or not. All I can say is that high intensity abdominal work, worked for me. That does not mean it will work for you. Like I said, everyone is different.*

*What really surprised me was that very few lifters routinely work their abdominal muscles when I was competing and that trend is still in existence today. This is a major mistake. Without question, your abdominal muscles are essential in performing heavy lifts. They stabilize your lower back and aid you in lifting heavy weight. If you have weak abdominal muscles, there is no way in the world you are going to lift heavy weight in the squat or deadlift or in any other lift for that matter. Worse yet, without strong abdominal muscles there is a good chance for back injuries...that has been well documented. Your abdominal muscles are that important.*

Should you take the Coan approach, the Biasiotto approach, or something in between, as is typical for most lifters?

You are facing two challenges if you pursue the former. First, you probably do not know how to contract your midsection properly under load. Second, you do not have much load on your body yet.

You have two choices. Just stick to the basic powerlifts, practice tightening up under the bar, patiently build up your poundages, and your abs will catch up. Or accelerate the process and add specialized training early on to cut back on it later. Coan admits: "I used to do [the abs] for so long, for so many years that I just don't do them that much anymore."



Regardless of which path you choose, stay away from belts, suits, groove briefs, etc. for the first couple of years of your training, until you get kind of strong. And if you do decide to use supportive gear later, do not wear it full time but save it for the heavy stuff, over 85% 1RM.

In *Back to the Future, Part III* a grizzled gun fighter broke his knuckles against Michael J. Fox's stomach cleverly protected by a cast iron plate. Today's powerlifter follows Marty McFly's slick tradition and protects his soft underbelly with a foot wide armored belt. Heavy ab training never crosses his mind. At best he does a few sets of high rep crunches or sit-ups to honor the beach season. Big mistake. To go back to the street fight analogy, boxers often break their hands in street fights. One of the reasons: they have not been taught how to form a tight fist, the way bare knuckle karate fighters do. Boxers' wraps give their fists and wrists an artificial feeling of tightness.

It is very tempting for a beginner to put on the cool looking gear of the pros and immediately get the bragging rights to bigger lifts. Unfortunately, the gear creates artificial tightness and prevents the up-and-comer from developing his torso strength. He will pay for it later with injuries and strength plateaus. An acquaintance of mine (700+ SQ @ 242) decided to try himself in a raw meet and found out to his surprise that his abs gave out before his legs! Indeed, containment of the inside pressure is part of the midsection muscles' job description.

Consistent use of a belt, especially not backed up with proper ab training, creates a weak link in the midsection. Fred Hatfield warned about this problem decades ago. Dr. Squat made a point of only wearing a belt on his heaviest squats. Ukrainian superheavy Yuri Spinov who religiously trained his abs did not bother to wear any belt at all, even when he squatted over 900. Some extremely impressive pulls have been made without a belt, such as Konstantinov's 939. So stay raw for at least a couple of years, if not for good.

There is a good reason IPF Masters World Powerlifting Champion Marty Gallagher calls the deadlift the "reverse situp". The deadlift ranks among the best midsection exercises. It operates on the same principle as the squat: the abs get a workout by containing the intra-abdominal pressure from a heavy poundage. However, Gallagher adds, "If you don't deadlift 500, you need to do ab work."

If you choose to accelerate your strength development, the following carefully selected exercises will quickly build your waist strength and teach you how to use it properly under the bar. These drills will also be of big help, at least in the off-season, to an experienced lifter who has not worked his abs directly for a long time.

Most of the drills you are about to do are isometric: the midsection muscles will be contracting without movement. This is specific to the powerlifts. However, you will do a few dynamic drills as well because, according to Russian specialists, isometrics are much more effective for building strength and muscle when they are combined with dynamic exercises.

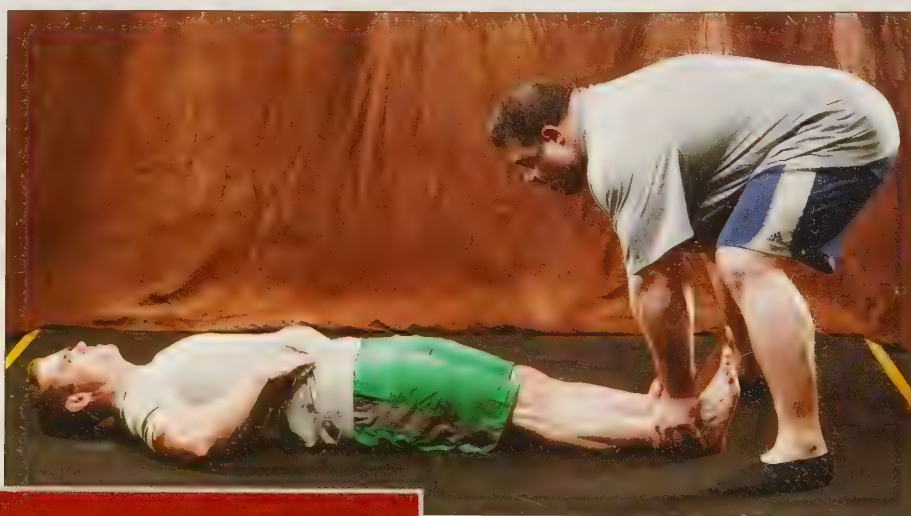
## ***Paradox breathing crunch***

The "paradox breathing" technique developed in Russia by Strelnikova for applications unrelated to powerlifting will teach you how to tense your abs while "packing" your belly with air.

Lie on your back with your legs straight.<sup>1</sup> If you are top heavy, anchor your feet under a piece of training equipment or furniture or have your training partner hold you down.

Crunch while inhaling deep into your belly through your nose or pursed lips. Yes, this is "backward"—hence the name of the technique: paradox breathing.

Try to minimize the movement of your neck.



***Crunch while inhaling deep into your belly through your nose or pursed lips.***



1. If you are a strength professional who wants to know why we recommend keeping your legs straight in the crunch, refer to *Facts and Fallacies of Fitness*, 6th edition (2003), Mel Siff and *Muscles, Testing and Function with Posture and Pain*, 5th edition, Kendall, Kendall, Provance, Rodgers, Romani (2005).



Keep pretending that you are inhaling even when you cannot get any more air, in order to keep your diaphragm muscle active. You will feel a "bubble" of pneumatic/hydraulic resistance in your belly. Keep the pressure in your stomach, not your head.

Exhale passively and relax on the way down. Rest your head on the deck momentarily before the next rep. Keeping your head up for time does your neck no favors. Indeed, try not curl up your neck if you can help it.

Do not strive to add reps and do not bother adding weight. Because this is a self-resisted exercise (the diaphragm versus the rest of the midsection muscles) you can make the drill tougher just by focusing on generating more tension. The ability to generate great tension without an external load is critical to a powerlifter. Bracing maximally before unracking the squat or bench or blasting off a deadlift is a skill no strong man can do without.

On the top of the crunch you may make a few short pumping actions with in-sniffles in an attempt to compress your stomach more. Palpating your abs and obliques with your fingers will help you generate more tension. Your waist should feel thick and powerful.

Eventually, once you have figured out how to control your diaphragm, you no longer need to pretend to be inhaling to keep bearing down. Simply hold your breath. Concentrated straight-legged crunches with the breath held were the favorite abdominal drill of Dr. Mel Siff.

You may do this exercise standing as well—anywhere, anytime.

Here is your recommended schedule:

For strength: NL 10-15 in sets of 3-5 reps. "NL" stands for the "number of lifts"—the total number of reps of the exercise per workout.

For strength and mass: NL 25-50 in sets of 5-10 reps.

The last set of loading parameters comes straight from powerlifting great RDC:

*A good weighted abdominal workout to build some size and strength is simply 5 sets of 10 reps; you can cycle down to 5x5 (for better strength results). Hold a weight against your chest, feet locked, knees slightly bent, do the situp, going not quite all the way up or all the way down... Finish off with 5 sets of 10 reps of side bends with a dumbbell in each hand (one hand at a time)... You will be amazed at the support that you will get from these for those big squats and dead lifts.*

Unlike the sissies at the health club, we keep the reps of our ab exercises low because our goal is to get STRONG. A couple of sets of 3-5 and long rest intervals will make your waist a lot stronger without making it bigger. But if you are serious about your lifts, do not be afraid to put on some muscle by doing more sets. If you agree that a waist is overrated, up your number of sets of 5 and try to get a pump with a heavy weight. In just a few months your six-pack will stick out farther than your pecs. It is good. Russians say that everything above a man's belt is chest!

As for the ladies... One comes to a tailor shop to order a new dress. He starts measuring her girth. The tailor works his way down from her armpits to her hips and keeps getting the same measurement—fifty inches. “Madam,” he clears his throat, “Where shall we place the waist?”

## ***Russian hockey deadlift***

Dr. Mel Siff pointed out that the traditional injury prevention strategy of avoiding “dangerous” exercises and excessive loads is inadequate as one is bound to end up in a “dangerous” position sooner or later. He proposed “injury prevention by imperfection training”.

The Russian hockey deadlift falls into that category. Do it at your own risk.

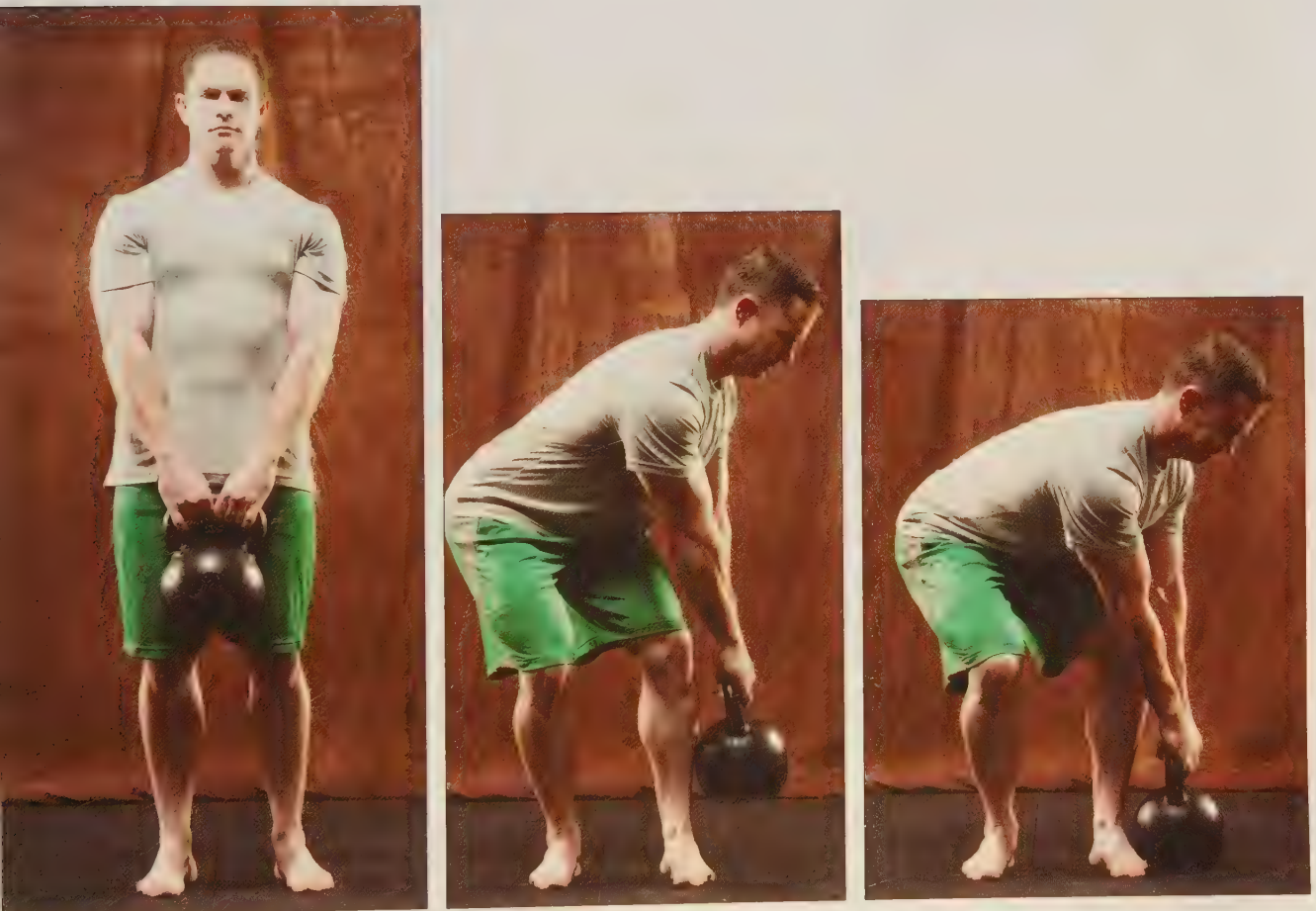




Deadlift a light kettlebell with both hands. Then slowly lower it to one of your heels (do not forget to hinge through your hips). Drop your head and round your upper back. Straighten out and twist to the other side. Russian hockey players traditionally perform 2-3 sets of 15-20 reps. Never to failure. Donnie Thompson, RKC who has made it one of his favorite kettlebell exercises, does 3x8, which is more down the lifter's alley.

The drill does more than bulletproof the back for the occasion when a heavy bar runs out of the SQ or DL groove. It builds and strengthens the obliques, so essential for putting up heavy weights. The internal obliques are among the most important muscles of the midsection for generating intra-abdominal pressure. The exercise also teaches one to integrate your lats with the obliques and glutes as well.

"The hockey deadlift is great," stated Louie Simmons.



## *Kettlebell renegade row*

This row does a lot more than work your “pulling” muscles—it smokes the abs. “Renegade rows are probably the best ab work I have ever done that is powerlifting specific,” reported US Armed Forces Powerlifting Champion Jack Reape, RKC. “My abs aren’t classic and small, but they are freaky strong, and those RR fry them...”

Assume the top of the pushup position on top of a pair of large kettlebells, at least 70-pounds. Tense your whole body—remember the static stomp deadlift. Press down hard into the kettlebell with your left. At the same time row with your right. Do not allow your body to twist or pike. Anti-rotation is the name of the game here.







*This row does a lot more than work your "pulling" muscles—it smokes the abs.*

If you are unable to row a 32kg bell, work one arm at a time. Rest one arm on a heavy bell or some stationary object and row the lighter one. Supporting yourself on a small bell is not a good idea as you could lose your balance on a small base of support. Stay away from yuppie bells with rubber or plastic bottoms. One such bell rolled as a military special operator was doing renegade rows and it was a miracle that he did not lose his thumb.

Several sets of 3-5 reps per arm will do the job.

## ***Zercher squat***

A beginning powerlifter's challenge is to tense his abs while maintaining a slight arch in his lower back. It is not easy at all and it takes a lot of practice. The Zercher squat will dramatically reduce the time it takes to master this skill.

The Z squat requires that you hold the barbell in the crooks of your elbows. It is an old exercise named after 1936 Missouri state weightlifting champion Ed Zercher. Ed took no credit for it and admitted that he had learned the "elbow squat" from some "Austrian or Australian". Regardless of its history, Louie Simmons assures that "Zercher lifts will build every squat and deadlift muscle in your body, with the exception of your hands." The reason we place it in the abdominal chapter is the crazy midsection contraction Zerchers produce, even with light weights. To your abs, a ZSQ with half of your max DL poundage feels like a max dead.



***Keep your  
shoulders down  
throughout.***



Here is the Zercher squat technique in a nutshell. Set up the bar in the power rack at your stomach level. Wear a long sleeve t-shirt to protect your elbows. Don't wrap a towel around the bar! The bar is likely to slide inside the towel and injure you. If you have a thick bar, use it.

Hook your elbows under the bar, your arms in the top of the barbell curl position. Your hands may touch, one fist inside the other. Wedge yourself under the bar, take a breath, tighten up, and aggressively squeeze it off the pins. Keep your shoulders down throughout. Lock your lats to make your back more stable and to make your glutes contract harder.

Walk out and set up in a stance slightly wider than your shoulders. Take a breath, which will not be easy with the bar compressing your diaphragm, and squat till the bar touches your knees and your thighs are below parallel. Pause momentarily with the bar on your knees without relaxing and drive up.



***Lock your lats to make your back more stable  
and to make your glutes contract harder.***



***Squat till the bar touches your knees and your thighs are below parallel.***

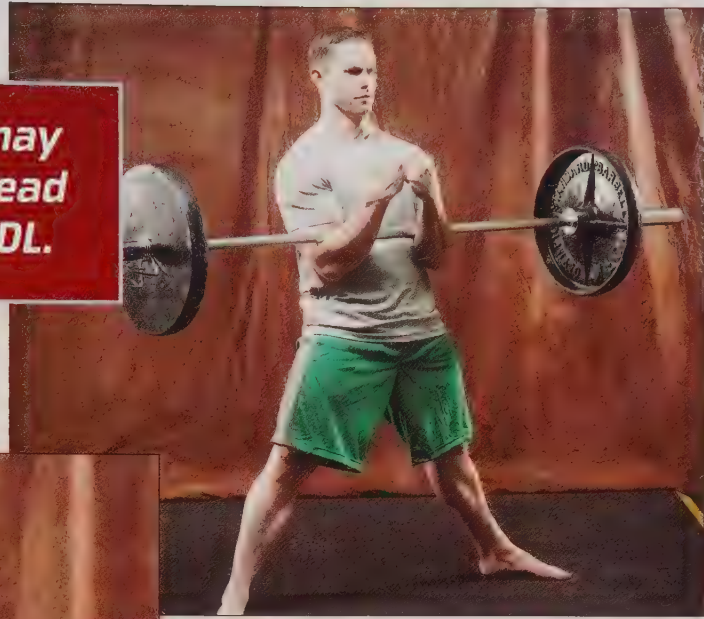
Because in the Zerchers the center of gravity is a lot lower than in the back or front squats, the weight is easier to balance and you can “grind” harder without losing your form.

As an option, you may do your ZSQs in a dead start fashion, as a DL. Set up the bar on power rack pins level with the top of your knees. A tough lift!

Because the Zerchers are so demanding, extra care is needed for integrating them into your training. For the first month consider using them as warmups for your squats. When you get the hang of them, replace the back squat with the Zercher squat for an entire cycle. Do this a couple of times a year. Aim to break your three or five rep record; there is no point in hitting max singles in a non-competition lift. It would serve you well to do one cycle in a medium stance and another in a wide stance identical to that of Andy’s power squat.



*As an option, you may do your ZSQs in a dead start fashion, as a DL.*



## *Suitcase deadlift*

The suitcase deadlift is a priceless exercise. It will greatly strengthen all your "side muscles"—lats, obliques, QL, glutes—and teach them how to play as a team.

Learn the drill with two kettlebells of the same size. Assume your conventional DL stance with your feet between two kettlebells, their handles parallel to your feet. Descend to the bells and assume your standard DL starting stance.

Take a hold of one kettlebell and stand up with it. Important: this exercise is not a side bend. Which means lateral spine flexion is not allowed. Your pelvis and shoulders must remain level when viewed from the front. It should appear like you are lifting two weights of equal size. Obviously, you will have to make your waist work hard to counter the asymmetrical load. Very quickly you will learn to lock in your lat, obliques, and glutes before you start pulling. Doc Hartle swears that this is one of those rare times when a mirror may be useful during lifting.





Repeat for five dead stop reps on one side. Then five on the other side.

Once you get a hang of the drill, try a different sequence: a rep with the kettlebell on the left, a rep with one on the right, a rep with both. The idea is to make the double kettlebell pull feel like two single bell pulls combined: lock both of your sides as if you are expecting an asymmetrical load, but do not know from which direction. This drill will teach you get tighter with a symmetrical load—the barbell.

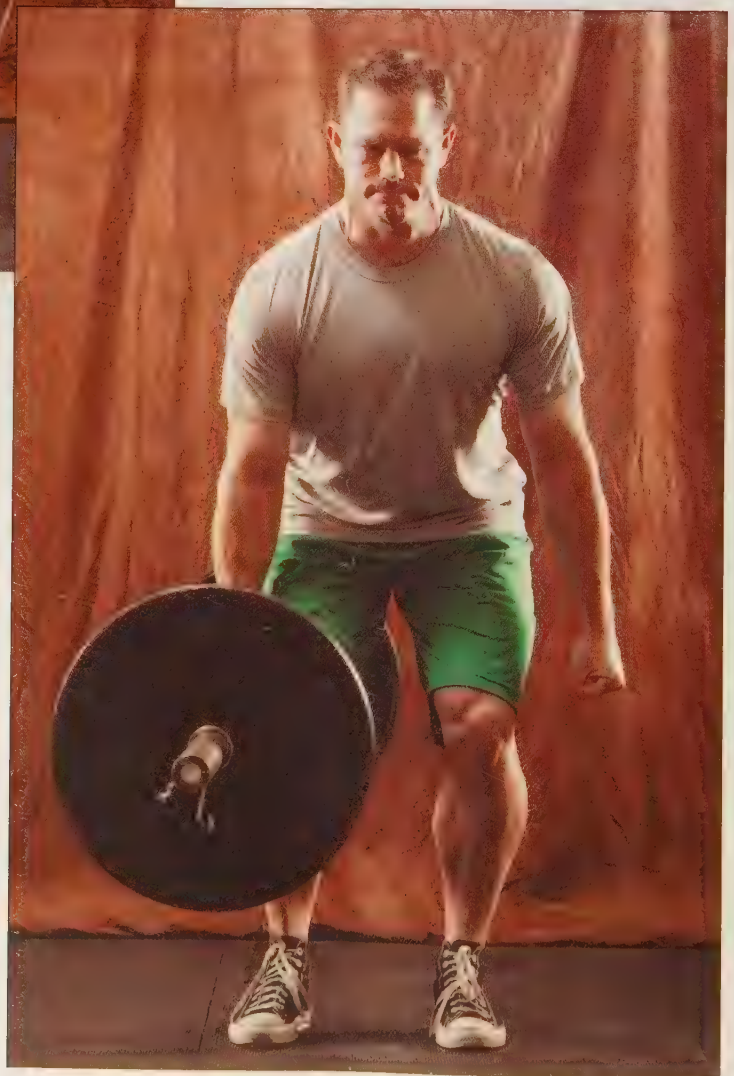
Eventually you will need more weight, so load up a barbell. Do not use plates smaller than 35s. Russian powerlifting coaches, while enthusiastically endorsing "deficit pulls", warn that going too low will force you to alter your deadlift technique. If you cannot safely handle 115 pounds (a bar plus a pair of 35s), either do your suitcase deads off boxes or power rack pins, or stick with kettlebells until you get stronger.

***Important: this exercise is not a side bend—lateral spine flexion is not allowed.***





***Your pelvis and shoulders must remain level when viewed from the front.***





When lifting a barbell, you will get an additional grip and wrist challenge. Even if you grip the bar exactly in the middle, you will still have to crush it. The bar will want to roll out of your hand and windmill, all at once. If it is running out of control, drop it or risk a tweaked wrist. Otherwise lower it under control and aim for the same exact spot you have lifted it from. Sit back and guide the bar back with your lat.



Aim to eventually work up to strong sets of five with your bodyweight. As the weight gets heavier relative to your bodyweight, the bar will cling to you, trying to stay over your base of support—your foot. Your body will awkwardly tilt away to accommodate it. Louie Simmons told me that he was suitcasing 185 when he deadlifted 670 @ 181 in competition. He made a point that he treated suitcase deads as an exercise, not a lift, and did not try heavy singles. Heed that advice.

The suitcase DL will thoroughly fry your deadlifting muscles, so plan them carefully. You may do a couple of easy sets as a warm-up for your regular deads. This will help you stay tight through your work sets. Another option is a couple of back-off sets of 3-5 after your regular pulls.

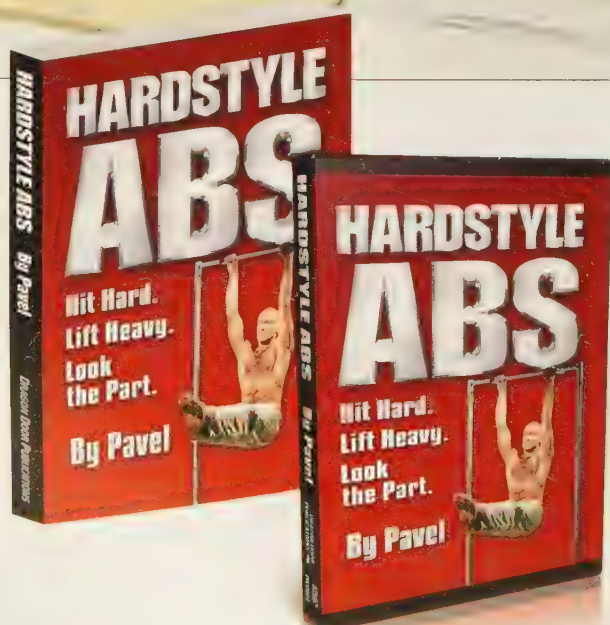
## Rotation exercises for powerlifters?

If you twist during a powerlift, something is obviously wrong. That said, although there is no rotation in this sport, strengthening your trunk rotators will up your lifts. Cresswell et al. (1994) concluded that an increase in the strength of the trunk rotators with training improves the ability to generate higher levels of voluntarily induced intra-abdominal pressure and increases the rate of intra-abdominal pressure development during functional situations.



Note that according to Prof. McGill, effective and safe rotational exercises do not involve spine rotation! The pelvis gets locked on to the rib cage and rotates as a unit. It happens to do just that in the Russian “full contact twist” exercise we tested at the good professor’s lab. For a detailed description of the drill see my book and DVD *Hardstyle Abs*.

Photo courtesy Prof. Stuart McGill’s Spine Biomechanics Lab, University of Waterloo, Canada





## RKC plank: the "isometric war"

Back in the late 1970s and early 1980s one of the most popular domestic rock bands in the Soviet Union was *Machina Vremeni*. "The Bonfire" was one of their iconic tracks.

*Every bonfire will burn out sooner or later.  
Wind will scatter the ashes and leave no trace.  
But while the fire is burning, everyone keeps it alive his own way...*

*The night is long. They keep their fires small, saving strength and firewood...  
But you did everything wrong and your bonfire leapt up to the sky.  
He was smart who has preserved his fire.  
He shared heat with no one else but he lasted till the warm days.  
But you were wrong, you burned everything fast and soon the big fire was gone.  
But while it burned, everyone got warmer.*

Endurance athletes train themselves to keep a small fire going for a long time. Strength athletes burn a mammoth fire fast.

The mindset of strength, in the words of the Russian song, is "not to be cheap with fire."

Senior RKC Thomas Phillips has called the plank "the most popular exercise performed incorrectly". Most folks either let their backs sag or their butts shoot up and use a minimal amount of effort in order to last the longest. Using poor form amounts to what Gray Cook, RKC, calls "adding fitness to dysfunction" and all sorts of problems down the road. And going for a minute or longer develops endurance rather than strength. The difference is fundamental. To express max strength one must learn to maximally contract all the muscles at once and hold nothing back. To develop muscular endurance one must learn to use as few muscles as possible and the least effort. The conflict is obvious. The bottom line: a strength athlete ought to practice the plank as an all out effort, and has no business leaving the 5-20sec window.

Giving it all in a short period of time is what the RKC plank is all about. Sports scientist Bret Contreras comments:

*The RKC plank is a reverse-engineered core exercise that has evolved into a brutal full body isohold. I learned about the RKC plank (also called the Hardstyle plank) from Pavel Tsatsouline, creator of the RKC, and when done right, it wipes you out completely after only ten seconds. Sure you can do a [regular] plank for 3 straight minutes, but now show me that you can do a [RKC] plank and exhaust your body through maximum muscle exertion. The RKC plank has you manipulating whole body muscle tension to generate maximum internal work. Though you won't be moving as it's a static exercise, you'll be engaging in a 10-second isometric war...*

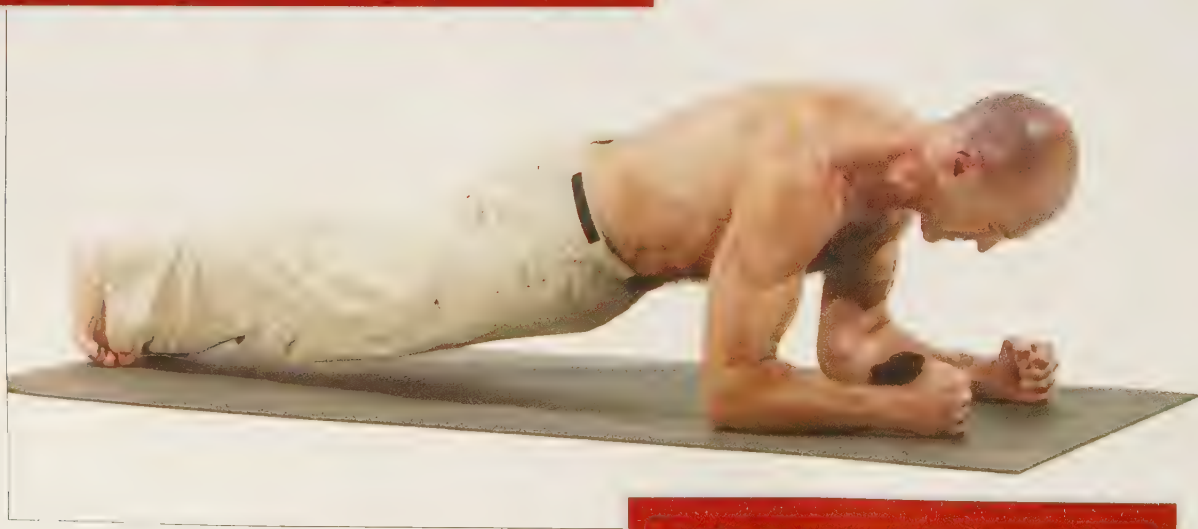
Contreras took EMG measurements to compare the peak activation of various midsection muscles in the traditional front plank and the RKC version and here are the results:

Exercise	Lower Rectus Abdominis (RA)	Internal Oblique (IO)	External Oblique (EO)
Standard Front Plank	33.5	42.6	26.7
<b>RKC Plank</b>	<b>115.0</b>	<b>99.5</b>	<b>104.0</b>

In the RKC plank, the six-pack is contracting more than three times more intensely, the internal obliques more than twice, the external obliques almost four times as intensely as in the typical plank seen in gyms everywhere.

It is the many technique subtleties that make the RKC plank work so well, so pay attention, and add various technique elements to your practice gradually. If you try to do it all the first time out, you are bound to forget something.

***Keep your whole body in one straight line, from head to toes.***



***Keep your fists in the "hammer" position.***



Place your elbows directly underneath your shoulders or slightly in front of them. Either keep your forearms parallel to each other or make your fists touch. Keep your fists in the “hammer” position.

Keep your whole body in one straight line, from head to toes. In the beginning it helps to have a training partner place a stick on your backside to teach you what a straight line is. Your back may not sag, your butt may not pike up. Your hips must extend as they do in the deadlift.

The stick will also help you correctly align your neck. The following subtle alignment practiced in martial arts and physical therapy makes a difference. Stretch your neck long—and then, in Dr. Michael Hartle’s words, “rotate the chin in the direction of your chest around the axis going through your ears.” This will flatten your neck against the stick. You may have to practice it lying on your back at first.

Look straight down on the ground, between your wrists.

Make tight fists.

Breathe shallow, as you would when holding a bar on your back between squat reps. Periodically employ Hardstyle breathing—short, powerful hisses. Do your best to keep the tension out of your head and neck.

Lock your knees and pull up your kneecaps. You will have an easier time doing this if you stretch your hip flexors first.

Cramp the glutes and try to tuck your tail under (posterior pelvic tilt)—without bending the knees!

We do it for many reasons. Contreras has one more and it is right down our alley: “The posterior pelvic tilt develops glute endurance and helps engrain proper deadlift lockout form.”

For anatomical reasons that are outside the scope of this book, you may not let your knees bend or your butt shoot up when you are strongly tucking in your tail!

A useful cue for the posterior pelvic tilt comes from karate: point your belly button slightly towards your head. Insist on keeping your knees locked and your kneecaps pulled up.

Use your lats to maximally “unshrug” your shoulders away from your ears.

When you have figured out how to do all of the above, add the following powerful subtleties added to the RKC plank by Dr. Michael Hartle, Senior RKC.

“Make sure the toes are fully extended and the ankle is maximally dorsiflexed.” In other words, point your feet and toes towards your nose. “This aids in the anterior chain contraction one is achieving during this plank.”

Simultaneously drive your elbows and your toes hard towards each other (isometrically). This will make your body pike or jackknife. Prevent your pelvis from rising by tensing your glutes even harder and driving the hips forward, as in the DL lockout. Now you will understand what Bret Contreras meant by the “isometric war”!

Practice the RKC plank in sets of approximately 10sec long, always stopping before the intensity of the contraction drops off. We are in the strength business—not endurance business.



# How to Build a Big, Strong Back



If you want to be really strong and pull huge numbers on the deadlift, you have to have a strong back. In fact, for all three of the powerlifts (squat, bench, and deadlift), a stronger back will lead to stronger lifts.

There are many exercises that you can use to train your back. In this chapter you are going to discover some of the best, how to perform them properly and where to put them in your training program.

The exercises that you will use to train your back can be divided into two main categories:

- Horizontal pulling movements (rows)
- Vertical pulling movements (pull-ups/pull-downs)

These days there is a new exercise in every article you read on strength training. However, you won't find any gimmicks here. Just tried and tested movements that are proven to build strength.

Let's start with the rows first...

## ***Hammer strength rows***

These are performed seated on a machine with a hammer (neutral) grip. They can be performed unilaterally (one arm at a time) or bilaterally (both arms together). Whichever option you choose; 3 to 4 sets of 5 to 12 reps work well. If you are trying to build strength in your back, shoot for sets of 5 to 8 reps. If you want to add muscle mass, increase the reps to the 8 to 12 rep range.

Be sure to set the machine up so that the top of the handles are around your lower chest line when you have rowed the handles in. To execute the movement correctly in a unilateral fashion, proceed as follows:

- Keep your abs braced throughout and against the pad.
- Start with your left arm straight and get a full stretch in your left lat.
- When you row the handle in, focus on forcing your left shoulder back and down.
- Repeat for reps and then do the same on your right side.
- There should not be any movement at the lumbar spine whatsoever.

Hammer strength rows are a great back movement to really pile the weight on and go heavy.

## ***One arm DB rows***

The one arm DB row is another great exercise for your lats and upper back. At first this appears to be a weaker version of the old school favorite, the barbell row. However, the one arm DB row has two major advantages over the barbell row; the first being that it allows a greater range of motion and the second being that it is a much easier movement to perform with good technique.

Barbell rows become ugly and poorly executed most of the time when lifters try to go heavy on them. This can stress the lower back a lot and when you are already deadlifting and squatting every week, your lower back does not really need added stress from an assistance exercise designed to hit your lats and upper back.

Here is how to execute a perfect one arm DB row on your left arm:

- Find a flat bench in your gym.
- Set up with your right knee and right hand on the bench.
- Your left foot should be flat on the floor.



- Keep your body in neutral alignment by keeping most of your weight on your left foot and right hand (the right knee should not be taking much of your weight).
- Arch your lower back and keep your abs braced throughout.
- Pick up the DB with your left hand and start with your arm hanging straight down.
- Now row the DB into your left hip, pulling your left shoulder back and down as you do so.
- Return to the start position, repeat for reps and then do the same on your right side.

You will not lift as much with this technique as you would if you chose to row the DB into your chest area as opposed to your hip. This is because rowing into the hip area requires a longer range of motion.

At first this might seem like a disadvantage. However, when you consider that these rows are designed to assist your deadlift and other big compound movements; you realize that executing the movement with good form and stressing the muscles of the back is more important than banging out endless sloppy reps with massive weights.

I have pulled 1,008lbs and yet I've never gone over 200lbs on one arm DB rows. But my form is always excellent when I do them and I row the DB into my hip. In contrast, you can now see many lifters on YouTube knocking out reps on one arm DB rows with 250 to 300lbs but they can't deadlift 800lbs. At first this may seem strange, but really it is not. The fact is that when you use really good form and row into your hip, the weights you use on your rows may not seem that impressive but the benefits will be.

The one arm DB row is nearly always seen done with a neutral grip, because that is the most natural way to do them. However, for variety you can perform them with a pronated grip or a supinated grip.

## ***Low pulley cable rows***

Low pulley cable rows are a great way to train your back.

You can use a variety of grips, providing that your gym has the attachments. Neutral, supinated and pronated grips can all be used, as well as close, medium and wide grips. With a little math you can see that you have nine options for training your back right there. Throw in the option of a full grip or a thumbless grip and that takes the count to 18 variations of low pulley cable rows.





Regardless of the specific grip that you choose to use for your cable rows, here is how you should perform them:

- Take hold of the attachment and put your feet against the foot plate.
- Sit tall; think chest out, shoulders back and down and head neutral.
- It is ok to lean back slightly, just keep good posture and your lower back arched as you do so.
- Start with your arms straight and feel the stretch in your lats.
- Row the bar all the way into your body, squeezing your upper back hard.

As with most exercises in the gym, most people make a mess of their cable rows. You will avoid making a mess of your cable rows if you take note of the above points and bear the following in mind:

- If you cannot touch the bar to your body, the weight you are using is too heavy.
- If your chest caves in at the top and you cannot pull your shoulders back and down, the weight you are using is too heavy.

Do not allow your ego to get in the way of your performance of good safe reps on your cable rows. Just say 'no' to cheating the weight up and excessive movement of your torso. Perform 3 to 4 sets of 8 to 12 reps as described above and you will be on your way to a bigger, stronger back, and a better squat, bench, and deadlift.

## ***Gymnastic ring inverted rows***

This is a tough movement that will work your back using only your bodyweight. Set up a pair of gymnastic rings in a power rack. The rings should be about 4 feet off the floor.

Take hold of the rings, put your feet on the floor, keep your body in a straight line and row yourself up towards the rings. Reverse the movement and repeat for reps.

This movement is like a 'horizontal pull-up' and is absolutely awesome. Simple to set up and very challenging.

Here are some key points to remember as you execute your gymnastic ring inverted rows:

- Your body must stay in a straight line from head to toe.
- Tighten your glutes to avoid your hips sagging.
- Keep your abs braced throughout.
- Start with your arms straight.
- Pull yourself all the way up until your chest is in line with the rings. At this point, force your shoulders back and down as you would with all other rowing exercises.

Once you master the exercise as described above, here are some ways to increase the difficulty:

- Elevate your feet on a bench.
- Elevate your feet on a Bosu Board or Swiss Ball.
- Add a weighted vest.
- Hold the top position (when your chest is touching the gymnastic rings) for 2 or 3 seconds (this one is really tough and if you can master 3 to 4 sets of 8 to 10 reps like this you will have developed some serious strength in your back).

Have fun with this exercise. It is much harder than it looks and provides a welcome change from the usual rowing movements.



## ***Standing single arm cable rows***

The standing, single arm cable row is a great movement for working the lats and upper back. It is a particularly good exercise if you have dodgy shoulders because many lifters with shoulder pain find they can use this exercise pain-free. If you have bad shoulders and still feel pain when doing this movement, your shoulders are probably really banged up! If that is the case, you had better find the cause of the problem and sort it as soon as possible.

To perform this movement, attach a D-handle to an adjustable pulley station that is set to shoulder height and proceed as follows:

- Grip the attachment with your left hand.
- Walk back from the rack with your arm straight.
- Stand tall; chest out, shoulders back and down, abs braced, glutes tight.
- Row your left arm into your body, at around your lower chest height.
- Return to the start position, repeat for reps and switch arms.

This exercise works very well if you hold the position for a 2 count when you have rowed the D-handle into your lower chest area. Try to maintain good posture and avoid using body momentum to swing the weight up as you row—use your lats and upper back instead. Higher reps, in the 10 to 12 range tend to work best on this movement.

Whichever rowing exercises you choose, they will help you build a bigger, stronger back and that will help your main compound movements; especially the deadlift. Without a strong back, your deadlift lockout will always suffer.

Let's move on and look at your best options for vertical pulling movements...

As far as vertical pulling movements go, you have two main options:

- Pull-ups
- Pull-downs

## *Pull-ups*







The pull-up is the king of upper body pulling exercises and while many gym rats claim to be able to knock out 15 or more reps in a set, most do so with form so pathetic, it cannot be considered a pull-up.

You shall practice your pull-ups the right way...

You may use a pronated (palms facing away from you) grip, neutral grip or supinated (palms facing towards you) grip for your pull-ups. Some call the supinated grip a 'chin-up', but we shall refer to them all as pull-up variations... there is no point making things more complicated than they need to be.

For your neutral and supinated grip pull-ups, use a full grip. For your pull-ups performed with a pronated grip, use a thumb-less grip because this will shift the emphasis to your lats and slightly off your biceps.

Here is how to perform your pull-ups the right way:

- Grip the bar and squeeze it hard.
- Start your first rep from a dead hang (feet in the air).
- Do your pull-ups with your legs straight or your knees bent; whichever posture you choose, keep it that way throughout the set (any swinging of your body is not allowed on strict pull-ups).
- Squeeze your abs, glutes and fists and launch yourself up until your chin clears the bar (do not even think about cutting your range of motion any shorter than that).
- Return back to the start position, all the way down so that your arms are straight and you feel a stretch in your lats and then repeat for reps.

Now that you know how to perform your pull-ups correctly, here are some methods for loading your pull-ups with more than just your bodyweight:

- Use a dipping belt.
- Use a weighted vest.
- Hang a kettlebell from your feet (you will need to use a straight leg posture for your pull-ups in order to do this).
- Hold a weight plate between your thighs (squeeze your legs together hard as you do this in order to stop the plate from falling to the floor).



- Use chain attached to a dipping belt—this way you make the pull-up heavier at the top and lighter at the bottom (is this a repeat of the first bullet?)

Despite the awesomeness of the pull-up, there are some common problems that you may experience. Here is a list of some of them and how to overcome them:

## **You are too heavy to do a single pull-up**

If your bodyweight (or current lack of pulling power) is stopping you from doing a single pull-up, perform them with a Jump Stretch band to reduce your bodyweight. To do this, choke the band around the top of your pull-up bar and then put the other end of the band under your feet (if you use the straight leg style) or your knees (for the bent knee style).

Now rep your pull-ups as usual.

As you get stronger, use a thinner band—this will allow you to gradually lift more of your bodyweight and eventually you will be able to rep out your pull-ups without the band.

## **You are experiencing wrist, elbow or shoulder pain when doing pull-ups**

If your wrists, elbows or shoulders are causing you pain on your pull-ups, there are some solutions that will probably allow you to proceed with your pull-ups pain-free. Here are some of the best:

- Stop doing supinated pull-ups because these can be downright nasty on the elbows.
- Ditch the pronated pull-ups as well because they can stress the shoulder (particularly when done with a wide grip).
- Start using a neutral grip on all your pull-ups. Shoulder width or slightly closer works best for most lifters.

If you still have pain, there is another option...

Switch to doing your pull-ups on a pair of gymnastic rings. To do this, set the rings to shoulder width and do not try to manipulate the rings as you pull. What you will find is two things:

1. These pull-ups are much harder than using a fixed bar. This is because the rings move around, giving the exercise a somewhat chaotic effect.
2. The rings will not stay in one position as you pull. Many lifters like to start with the rings in a neutral grip, but find that they naturally supinate as they pull. Do not fight this because it is

this very natural movement that makes the rings so much safer for the wrists, elbows and shoulders than regular pull-ups performed on a fixed bar.

If you are planning on doing a lot of pull-ups then the rings may be your best option even if you can currently do fixed bar pull-ups without pain. After-all, the iron game is a marathon and not a sprint and you want to stay pain-free for as long as you are lifting weights.

As good as pull-ups are, there is another style of vertical pulling movement that you can use to build your lats, upper back, biceps, forearms and grip...

## ***Pull-downs***





You can perform your pull-downs with a variety of grips, just like the pull-ups. Whether you choose to use a pronated, supinated or neutral grip; you should do them in a strict style. You can also use close, medium or wide grips.

Here is how they should be done:

- Set the machine up so that the thigh pad is tight on your thighs.
- Grip the bar and sit down.
- Start with your arms straight and feel the stretch in your lats.
- Pull the bar down until it touches your chest; when it does so, squeeze your shoulders back and down (try to re-create your bench press position).
- Return the bar to the start position and repeat for reps.

Throughout each and every rep of your pull-downs, squeeze the bar as hard as possible, keep your lower back arched and your chest pushed out.

You can see that you have many options for training your back—there is no reason for your progress to stop. You should never get bored of training your back, physically or psychologically. If you ever do feel burnt out and fatigued, have an easy week of training (or a week off) and then come back to the gym and choose a different set of back exercises and work those for a few weeks.

Here are four important tips for training your back:

- Do more upper body pulling than you do pressing. This is great for shoulder health and balance in your physique. If you do 100 reps of pressing in a training week, do at least 100 reps of pulling (rows and pull-ups/pull-downs).
- Use strict form—stay tight, squeeze the bar hard, utilize a full range of motion.
- Perform 3 to 4 sets of 5 to 12 reps on any given upper body pulling movement. (The exception to this rule is if you decide to use a specialised system such as a ladder method).
- You can do all your sets at one weight or you can ramp up the weight, getting heavier on each set. If you use the latter option, your last set is your ‘money set’... it will get you the most strength and muscle gains.
- Do your upper body pulling movements after your big compound strength movements like squats, deadlifts, presses, snatches, and cleans.

Finally, you must know where to put your upper body pulling exercises in your weekly training program. The good news is that you have many options. The bad news is that many options can often be confusing.

Here are some examples:

#### **Twice a week training**

##### **Day 1:**

Squat, bench press, gymnastic ring pull-ups

##### **Day 2:**

Deadlift, overhead press, one arm db rows

Or

##### **Day 1:**

Squat, bench press, deadlift

##### **Day 2:**

Hammer strength rows, neutral grip pull-ups, low pulley cable rows

#### **Three times a week training**

##### **Monday:**

Bench press, lateral raises, bent over lateral raises

##### **Wednesday:**

Squat, deadlift, two rowing exercises, and one vertical pulling exercise of your choice

##### **Saturday:**

Conditioning work, abs, grip work

(This is how I train)

Or

##### **Monday:**

Squat, glute ham raises, db side bends

##### **Wednesday:**

Bench press, board press, wide grip pull-ups, one arm db rows

##### **Friday:**

Deadlift, band leg curls, sled dragging



### Four times a week training

Day 1: Upper body

Day 2: Lower body

Day 3: Upper body

Day 4: Lower body

With a training split like this, do your upper body pulling movements on day 1 and day 3. One day 1 perform a pull-up or pull-down variation and do some rows on day 3.

As you can see, there are many options and there is no right and wrong—providing you are sensible with your training programming.

You have several options above for programming your upper body pulling movements. With a little thought, you could think of a thousand more.

However, you only need one plan that works.

Whatever you do, do at least one vertical and one horizontal pulling movement in every training week. Do more upper body pulling reps than pressing reps and when you get bored of an exercise or progress stops, switch it for a new one.

The only thing that is totally set in stone is that you must strive to add weight, reps or sets over time. After all, that is how you get stronger.





# Bench Press Assistance Exercises



he bench press is probably the most popular ‘gym exercise’ in the world—and if it doesn’t quite grab the title, it’s almost definitely only second to bicep curls.

Let’s start with the easiest area first—the pecs. Assistance movements for the pecs are optional. If you are doing a lot of bench pressing they are not required.

In fact, the assistance exercises for the pecs are really to help recovery, as opposed to build strength.

Once a week you can perform 2 to 4 sets of high rep DB flys or machine flys. Keep the weight low and do 15 to 25 reps per set. If this makes your pecs feel better and speeds up your recovery, keep them in your program.

If not, don’t bother with them.

Now let’s move on and talk about what you must do for the shoulders and triceps.

After bench pressing, work the triceps. This can be done with all kinds of extensions—skull-crushers, Tate presses, push downs.

There are countless options.

The only problem with all of these exercises is that they cause many lifters elbow pain. This elbow pain may not occur straight away, but it may creep up on you after months or years of hitting the iron hard.

And pain is your body's way of saying STOP!

So does this mean you should not do any direct tricep work?

Not exactly.

Allow me to explain.

For some lifters, extensions can be done with no elbow pain at all. These lifters are often short armed, model benchers. If that's you, go ahead and perform one tricep movement after benching, for 3 to 4 sets of 8 to 12 reps.

You can choose from the following movements:

Skullcrushers with a straight bar or ez bar, on a flat, decline or incline bench

Tate presses with the elbows out

Tricep pushdown using a straight bar, v-bar or rope attachment

However, what if extensions do cause you pain?

Worry not, help is at hand.

Enter chain tricep extensions, band-only push downs and band-only over head extensions.

Bands and chains make the movement harder at the top than they do at the bottom. The great thing about bands and chains for tricep work is that they take the pressure off the elbows at the bottom of the movement (which is the part of the movement that tends to cause problems) and they overload the top of the movement (which is where the triceps work hardest on the bench anyway).

Perfect.

For chain tricep extensions, simply attach a D-handle to two chains, lay on a bench and perform extensions like you would skullcrushers. Do 3 to 4 sets of 8 to 15 reps.

For band pushdowns simply loop a band over the top of something sturdy (like a power rack) and do pushdowns like you would with a v-bar or rope. Do 3 to 4 sets of 10 to 20 reps.

For band extensions, set the band up as you would for pushdowns and this time face away from the apparatus that the band is attached to and perform extensions overhead. Do 3 to 4 sets of 10 to 15 reps.

Finally, let's talk about assistance movements for the shoulders.



I like to hit the shoulders with one overhead pressing movement in each training week. This could be military press, seated barbell presses, seated DB presses or standing DB presses.

You can train these pressing movements heavy, but don't go below 6 reps per set. (Save the low rep training for the 'big 3').

After heavy overhead pressing, perform 3 sets of side lateral raises and bent over DB lateral raises. 10 to 15 reps work best for these movements.

On all assistance exercises, leave at least a rep or two in the tank. In other words, do not push to failure.

---

## Kettlebell halo

**P** Donnie and others have added the kettlebell “halo” to their regimen and got healthier shoulders out of it. Hold a kettlebell upside down by its horns and slowly move it around your head. Work up to progressively tighter circles. Keep your shoulders down and your glutes tight—“pinch a coin”—to protect your back.



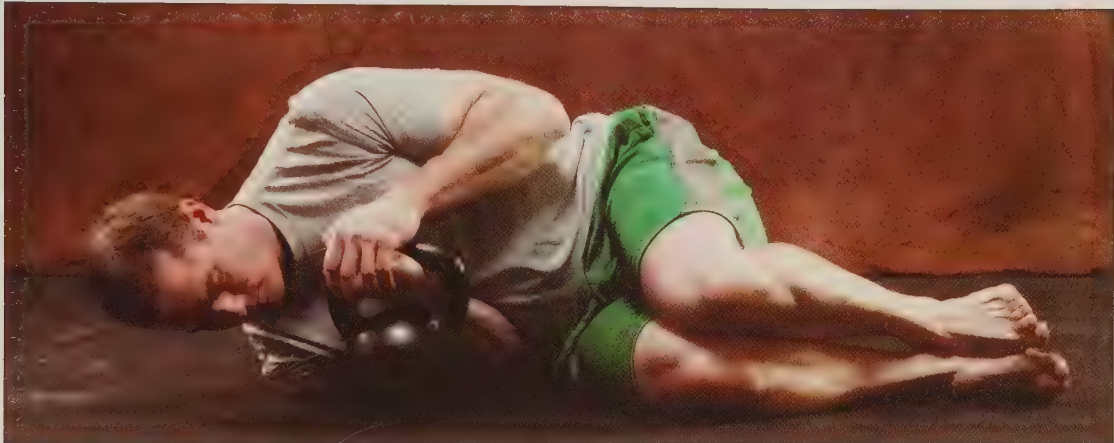




## ***Kettlebell RKC arm bar***

It is no secret that a strong lifter's wrists, elbows, and shoulders take a beating under a heavy squat. As a result, the bench press suffers. Sometimes nerves get pinched and compromise the grip, then the deadlift hurts too.

The RKC arm bar will greatly increase your thoracic spine and shoulder girdle mobility and stretch your pecs and lats. This will make it a lot more comfortable to rack a heavy barbell for the squat.



You are about to do a right-handed arm bar. Lie on your right side, a light kettlebell sitting on your right next to your ribs. Curl grip the handle with your right hand, then overlap your fingers with a thumbless grip of your left. Keeping the kettlebell as close to your body as possible, roll on your back and bring it to the bottom of your ribcage with this two-handed pistol grip. Let go with the left and press the bell up (the floor press).

Stretch your left arm on the ground by your head (if you were standing, you would be in the overhead lockout).

Grip the handle medium hard keeping your wrist straight, as if for a punch.

Using your left arm and leg as the axis of rotation and leaving the right arm with the kettlebell straight and vertical, bring your right knee towards your chest, and roll to your left.

Flex your left shoulder—you will need to “creep” your straight arm on the ground—and relax your neck, resting your head on your left biceps or in its vicinity. Do not look at the kettlebell.

Straighten out your right leg and lay it on the ground. Your feet should be a shoulders' width apart or wider, your knees straight, your toes pointed.

Start rhythmically, approximately one rep per two seconds, contracting your right glute, trying to bring your right hip towards the ground. The hip action is similar to that of a punch or a throw. This hip extension will also bring the right side of the chest down towards the ground, thus stretching it away from the stationary kettlebell.

At all times during the drill keep both shoulders pressed away from your ears and packed into their sockets. Use the visualization of “lengthening collarbones” and pinch your shoulder blades together to help the stretch.

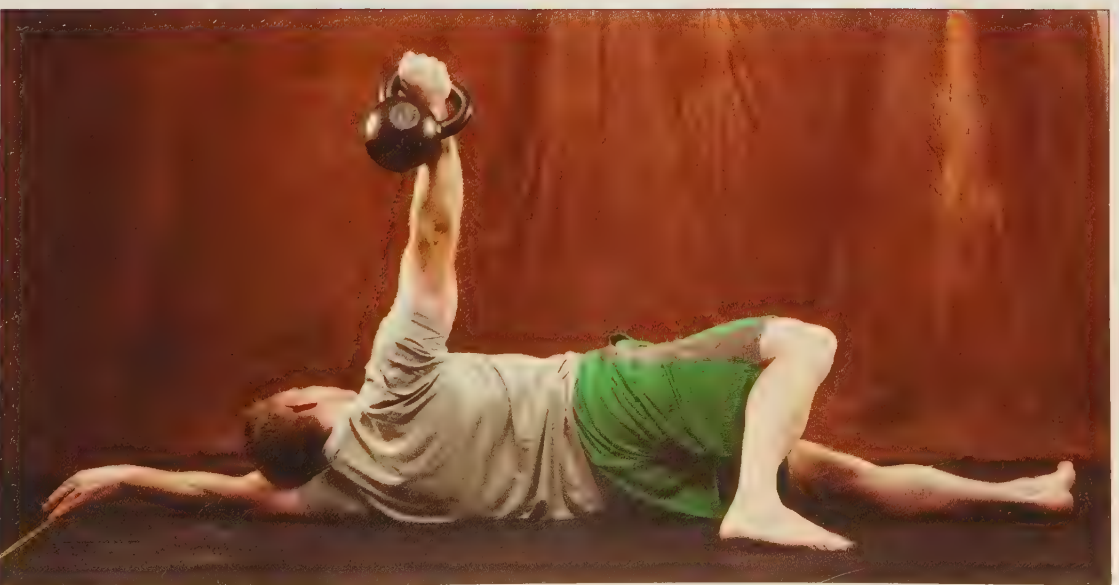
After a few repetitions reverse the stretch a little and creep your left arm more into shoulder flexion (very flexible people will find their heads on the ground). Then continue.

Use controlled strength to increase your ROM in this drill; do not mindlessly go back and forth.

To switch sides, perform a half-halo or sit up and spin around. Do not carry the kettlebell over your chest or face.

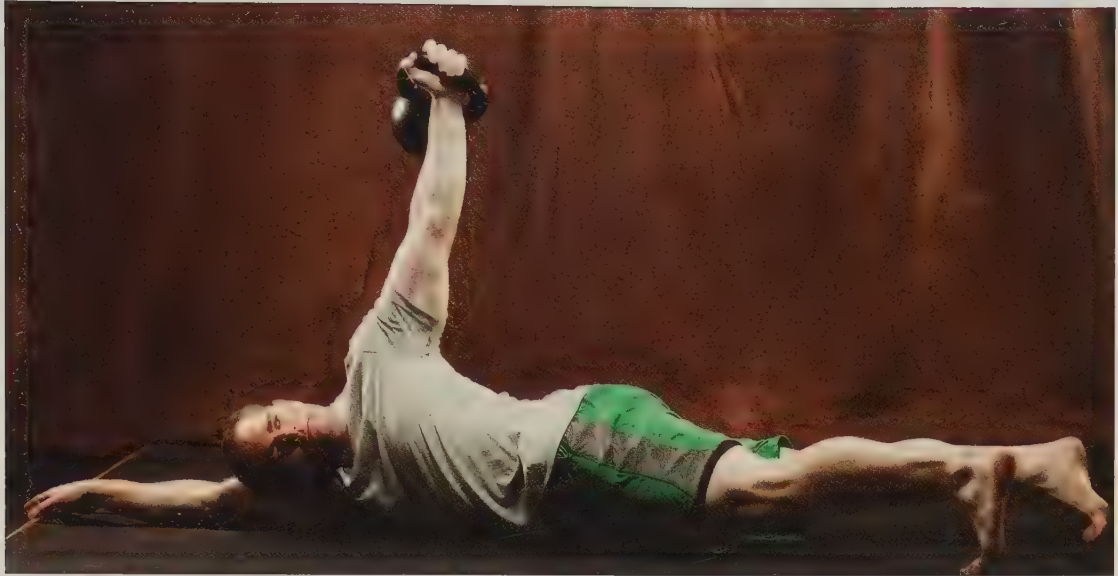
At least in the beginning, perform the RKC arm bar with a spotter who should be sitting on the ground on your right side, ready to catch the bell, should you lose control.















# The Advanced Weekly Schedule



People are always amazed at how I train, because my training split and entire methodology differs greatly from how many of the other great powerlifters train.

However, I stand by my training style because it delivers results! If you take my best squat and my best deadlift and add the two up, I'm still the man (1,214lbs and 1,008lbs). Period. The numbers don't lie.

So clearly, I've done many things right over the past 20 years. The thing is, I've also achieved those results doing a lot less training than many of my rivals.

On the front of the great textbook *Science of Sports Training* by Thomas Kurz, there is a quote that reads:

*“Training is efficient if the highest sports result is achieved with the least expense of time and energy”*

Based on that definition, my training style has been “efficiency personified” for me.

Here is how I have trained most of my career...

Monday: bench press and rear delts

Wednesday: squat, deadlift and leg press

Thursday: cardio, upper back, lats, shoulders, biceps

Saturday: grip, core, kb swings, leg curls

## ***The Monday session is easily explained***

The bench press has always been my weakest lift, therefore I train it first in the week, when I'm freshest. The rear delts are trained on this day because they are undertrained compared to the front and side delts, due to all the pressing I do.

After benching (usually both raw and equipped) I have little left in the tank, so 3 to 5 sets of rear delts is a good way to end the workout. And it is not work for the sake of work. It is for balance and prehabilitation.

The exercise of choice for the rear delts is usually bent over lateral raises or band pull aparts. Reps are usually high, in the range of 10 to 15 per set.

## ***The Wednesday session is my hardest of the week***

I train squats and deadlifts on the same day because that is how I compete at the meet. So I practice as I play.

By training deadlifts after squats, it avoids getting a false sense of strength on the pull. I have seen many lifters overestimate their pulls at the competition because they never felt what it was like to pull big after a squat. Reality can be a tough mistress for such lifters.

Leg presses are frowned upon by many strength coaches. They claim the movement is not "functional" and dangerous on the lower back. Here is what I say to those guys...

The leg press is simply an assistance movement for me, it helps my legs grow. After heavy squats and deadlifts, I do not have the desire nor the need to do another high co-ordination free weight movement.

To keep the leg presses safe on the lower back I always "pull myself down into the seat" and do not let my lower back come off the bottom of the pad at the bottom of the movement. The core stays tight throughout.

3 to 5 sets of 10 to 12 reps gets the job done.

The squats and deadlifts build my limit strength; the leg presses build my leg size. I do not do any direct lower back work (like back extensions) because my lower back is naturally very strong.



## ***Thursday is the first and main assistance day of the week***

My Thursday sessions are more like that of a bodybuilder, consisting of 2 to 4 sets of 8 to 12 reps per movement. I train back on this day because I then have 6 days to recover before my next heavy deadlift session.

This is not a viewpoint other powerlifters take, but it is how I see things and it has worked well for me.

Here is how a typical session on a Thursday looks for me...

15 minutes cardio (treadmill or cross-trainer).

Hammer strength rows: 3 to 4 sets of 5 to 8 reps/side (I push these hard).

Pulldowns: 3 to 4 sets of 10 reps (leaving a couple of reps in the tank of each set).

Straight arm lat pull downs: 3 sets of 12 reps (moderate weight, just pumping the reps out).

Barbell shrugs: 3 sets of 3 to 6 reps (more a test of grip than anything else because I don't use straps).

Military press: 4 sets of 10 reps (push these quite hard).

Curls: 2 sets of 10 reps (easy).

All this usually gets done in an hour and I'll rotate the exercises whenever I feel like it. Thursday is a session for me to do some serious work but also have some fun. I do not plan a "cycle" on my back exercises—I simply train them hard and see what I can do on the day.

One final note on Thursdays... you will notice that I start with some cardio. I do this because I believe it is good for my health. In recent years, any kind of steady state cardio has taken a beating from strength coaches claiming it will make people weak.

If light cardio hinders a lifter's strength then that lifter has serious problems. That is all I will say. The cardio question is up to you but be very careful who you listen to. I would recommend a few light cardio sessions per week even for strength athletes.

And when I say "cardio", 20 minutes walks do count! (On the other hand, if you start running 10k 5 times a week, you are missing the point).

## ***Saturday is time for all the 'little stuff'***

On Saturdays I use simple exercises to bring up weak points.

I train quickly and get done in an hour.

Here is how a typical session might look:

Leg curls: 3 sets of 10 reps

Leg presses: 2 sets of 20 reps

Kettlebell swings: 2 sets of 10 reps

Plank: 3 sets of 10 seconds

Fat bar holds: 3 sets of 5 reps

There you have it—exactly how I train.

Over the years many people have accused me of not being 100% truthful about my training, claiming that I have ‘secrets’ that I won’t share. To those people I offer them a challenge: come train with me and you’ll see that what I have just shared with you is exactly how I do it. Guaranteed.

## ***More on programming, especially for Saturday***

By doing light lower body work on a Saturday, I find that my performance on Wednesday is better than if I just rested and didn’t do any more lower body work between sessions on the Wednesday.

The leg presses and leg curls are done for high reps to build tendon and ligament strength. In *Supertraining*, Mel Siff talks about how low reps build muscular strength but often the tendons and ligaments fail to see comparable increases in strength.

This can lead to injury.

By doing higher reps, 10 to 30, with moderate weight (25 to 40%) of a max, you can build tendon and ligament strength. This work takes very little out of you and is wise to do if you like to “stack the odds in your favor”.



Also, the act of pumping with high reps can be very therapeutic and good for recovery.

The grip work on Saturday is there because since I pulled in excess of 950lbs, grip became an issue for me. Fat bar work and pinch grip work help me out tremendously and helped me to finally pull 1,008lbs.

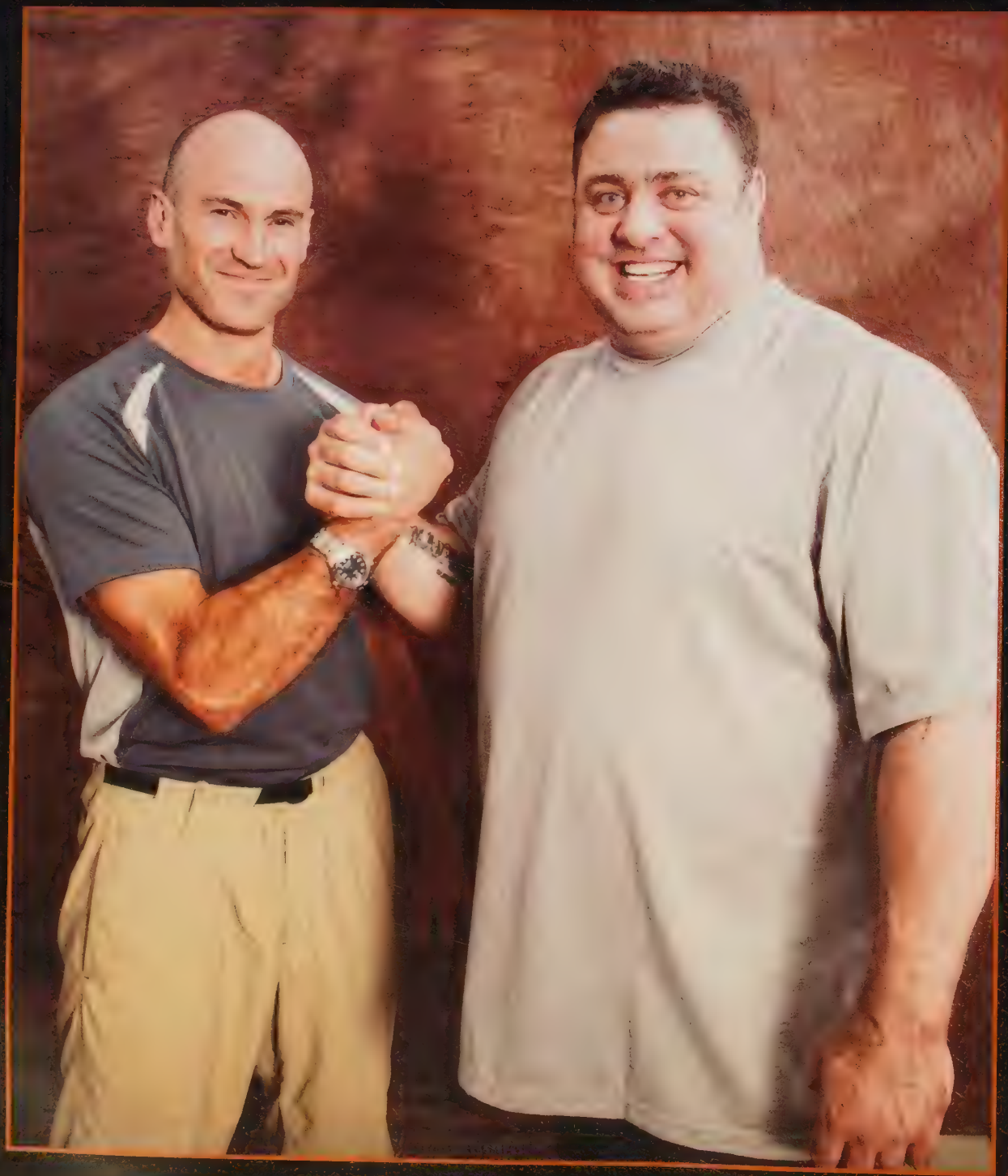
If ever there was a misunderstood area of strength training it is on the issue of how to get a stronger grip for the deadlift. 100 top lifters will tell you 100 different things. You must experiment and find what works for you.

Finally, the core work on a Saturday is there because without a strong core, you cannot be truly strong. Every great lifter knows that keeping tight is the key to generating force and ultimately, being strong. To get tight, you have to tense your core hard.

The stronger your core is and the harder you tense it, the more force will irradiate to other areas of your body.

**Quick Tip:** On every set of every exercise you do... tense your abs, lats and grip as hard as possible. You will become stronger—instantly. Try it and become a believer.

Also, start every strength training session with a set of 12 reps on the glute bridge and a 10 second hold on the plank. Try it for a week and see what happens. You will be stronger because nearly everyone has inactive glutes and a weak core.





# Deadlift Dynamite Power to You!



he deadlift is the king of all strength exercises. If that wasn't clear to you before you started reading this book, it will be now that you've made it this far.

The deadlift stresses virtually every muscle group in your body and builds hands of steel (unlike the squat) and compared to the Olympic lifts, it is both easier to learn and lets you lift a lot more weight.

For total-body strength, the bench press doesn't even come close.

Indeed, if you could only do one exercise for the rest of your life, regardless of whether your goal was to build strength, muscle or improve athletic performance (or all three), the deadlift would be a great choice of exercise.

Wherever you are at right now, remember that **TECHNIQUE** is first and foremost.

Quite simply, the better your technique, the faster your gains will be and the lower your injury risk will be. A winning combination, I'm sure you'll agree.

Our challenge to you is to take the information in this book and use it to master your deadlift technique and then advance your strength. It doesn't matter whether you are trying to pull your first bodyweight deadlift or 3.5 times bodyweight—if you use the information we have presented to you in this book you'll eventually reach your goals.

We'd love to hear your success stories, comments, questions and suggestions. Please send them to [andy@andyboltonstrength.com](mailto:andy@andyboltonstrength.com).

Stay strong,

Andy and Pavel

# ABOUT ANDY BOLTON

In his Powerlifting career Andy has won **numerous national and international titles**, breaking *dozens of world records* along the way. Highlights include multiple titles at the WPC and WPO Powerlifting championships.

He is most famous for his Deadlift, being the first man to break the mythical 1,000lbs mark, pulling 1,003lbs first and then following this up with another historic pull of 1,008lbs several years later.

He has also deadlifted 900lbs or more in nearly 40 powerlifting competitions. The fact that only 14 men have ever pulled 900lbs or more in powerlifting competition makes this feat even more impressive.



**Andy is a Deadlift Machine!**

No slouch in the squat department either, Andy is one of only a few men to squat over 1,200lbs and **his best combined squat and deadlift beat that of any other man on the planet!**

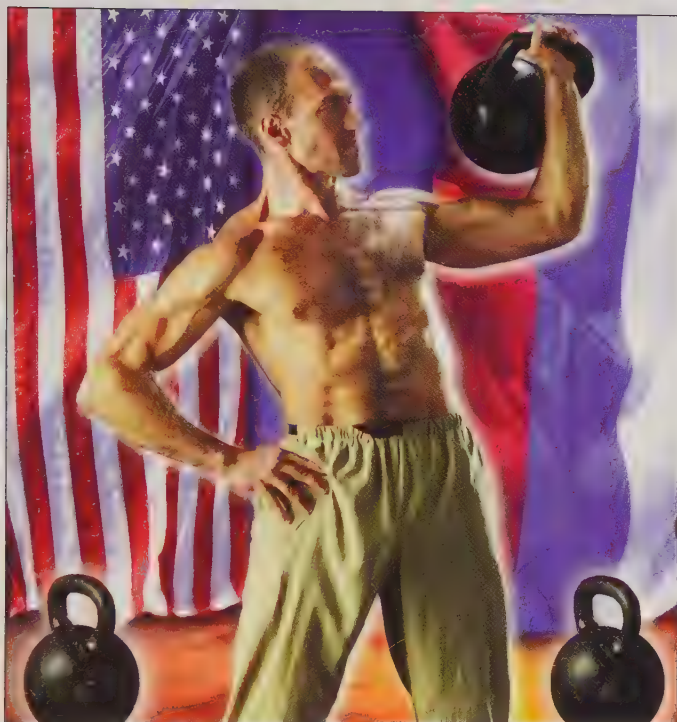
Andy has been featured on national television shows, in major magazines like Muscle and Fitness and Men's Health, on the front cover of Powerlifting USA and regularly writes for major websites like t-nation and Muscle and Fitness.

Andy also helps many lifters to achieve their strength and physique goals using his tried-and-tested training methods.

Whilst many trainers latch onto the latest novelty exercises and fitness fads of the training world, Andy sticks to what he knows... Helping people to get very strong and build a ton of muscle using the barbell and proven systems of strength training.



# ABOUT PAVEL



Pavel Tsatsouline, is a former Soviet Special Forces physical training instructor, currently a subject matter expert to the US Navy SEALs and the US Secret Service.

Although Pavel's expertise lies in training gun carrying professionals, his "low tech/high concept" training methods have been increasingly and successfully used by elite athletes and their coaches. Among them are UFC star Joe Lauzon, 200m sprint women's world record holder Allyson Felix, and Donnie Thompson who posted the highest powerlifting total of all time.

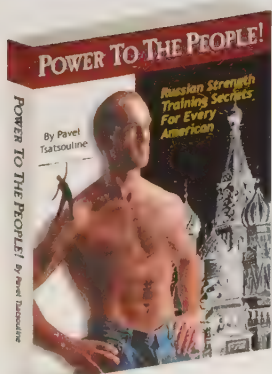
Pavel is the author of several bestselling strength training books, including *Power to the People!*, *The Naked Warrior*, and *Enter the Kettlebell!*

In 2001 Pavel's company and Dragon Door introduced the Russian kettlebell to the West and launched RKC, the kettlebell instructor course, which became the industry's golden standard.

# "A Strength Classic for the Ages, Pavel's *Power to the People!* Cuts to the Chase — Delivering the Absolute Essentials for Ultimate Success in the Iron Game..."

**"Pavel Tsatsouline, Russian strength training expert, wrote a wonderful book... I used these strength building secrets for one week and my max deadlift went up 18%."**

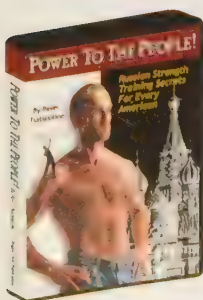
—Larry Scott, author of *Loaded Guns*, World's First Mr. Olympia



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- How to instantly boost your strength with Pavel's High-Tension Techniques™
- How to become super strong and live to tell about it
- How to dramatically amplify your power with the proprietary Power Breathing™ techniques (and why everything you know about breathing when lifting is wrong!)
- How to feel energized and fantastic after your strength workout—rather than dragging and fatigued
- How to get brutally strong all over — with only two old-school exercises



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Mid-Level



Advanced

## **Power to the People! is the best!!**

"I must give a review for *Power to the People!*, because I am grateful for the increase in strength that I have gained in less than a year. Results don't lie. Before PTP, I was only able to deadlift 270 lbs. Now, **11 months later, I can deadlift 500 lbs.** If you want strength, this book is what I recommend. As a matter of fact, I know of no other better book on strength training. I just wish I had this book 10 years ago."

—Howard Spencer, Trinidad and Tobago

## **Stop Wasting Time and Buy this Book Immediately!**

"As a track and field coach of beginner to elite athletes I am always researching new and better methods for helping my athletes to realize their potential. Enter Pavel, the Evil Russian! After my first reading of *Power to the People!* I had to immediately read it again for a second, and then 3rd time. I could not believe how simple and straightforward strength training could be while based highly on scientific physiological principles. I have been applying this information for months and am seeing **rapid lifetime strength gains.** Quite simply, the best book written on strength training!"

—Kris Allison, Director, Lone Star Athletic, New Braunfels, TX

## **Skinny Strong**

"I lift three times a week, for 20 minutes at a time, sometimes 30. I like to lift, but I am an attorney and haven't more time right now. When I began on Pavel's system, I could do 3 bodyweight pull-ups. Last night I got 2 great form pullup singles with 105 lbs. of chain around my waist. Considering that I have been lifting year round for 16 years, and my pulling strength did not appreciably improve in the 10 years prior to checking out PTP, I would say to anyone that it is a great place to start."

—Warner Kallus, Boston, MA

## **Powerlifting Eye Surgeon Endorses *Power to the People!***

"Pavel's information in *Power to the People!* is beneficial even for experienced strength athletes. I found many helpful pearls to increase my powerlifting totals even though I already hold many national and world powerlifting records and titles. I will be using his advice this month in competitions. I strongly recommend *Power to the People!* to increase your power."

—Johnny Gayton, M.D., Warner Robins, GA

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Order *Power to the People!* book online:  
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# Acclaim for *Beyond Bodybuilding*

*Beyond Bodybuilding* is a treasure chest of strength training secrets."—**Larry Scott**, first Mr. Olympia

Thanks for your recent contribution to the empire of muscle and might. Very interesting and valuable."  
—**Steve Draper**, Author *Brother Iron*, *Sister Steel*, former Mr. America, Mr. Universe and Mr. World

If you are serious about physical renovation and want a new approach to progressive resistance training, then choose *Beyond Bodybuilding*."

**Patty Gallagher**, former washingtonpost.com columnist, five-time world master powerlifting champion, and co-coach, 1991 world powerlifting team champions

When I first received *Beyond Bodybuilding*, I blocked out an entire day so I'd have enough time and undivided attention to savor its contents... If you think you've already seen everything Pavel has to offer, this book will prove you wrong. Don't make me come over there — get it to dragondoor.com and get your copy today!"  
—**Charles Staley**, creator of the Escalating Density Training (EDT) system.

## **PTP/Ladder Hybrid was genius**

I've used the PTP/ladder hybrid for my deadlift. Even though I had a few difficulties finishing the program, I still managed to add 110 pounds to my deadlift in a little over 6 months. It went from 475 to 585 and both were done in 5 seconds."—**Tobi Alder**, Hillsborough, NJ

## **2nd copy**

I lent my dog-eared copy to a friend realizing I'd probably never get it back, so I bought a second for myself. This book helped me understand how to build strength. The first regimen I took from the book to build muscle was the "Russian Bodybuilding Underground Base Pull Program". It was the first time I experienced significant growth in my biceps, simply through low weight only exercises. I'd spent years struggling with curls for years with lackluster success. Additionally, squat routines have resulted in gains as well. I highly recommend this book to anyone who wants to pursue routines that deliver results."

**John Bergstresser**, Los Angeles, CA

## **Other Authors Should Just Give Up!**

This book is absolutely amazing. As far as strength training goes, since I got this book (over eighteen months

ago), I have not done a routine I found anywhere else. The principles, programs, and advice given in it are the absolute top available. With this book, I have:

- Increased my bench press over 100lbs. and finally learnt how to perform this movement properly
- Increased my squat and deadlift over 200lbs. each
- Increased my push-up max from a lame 25 to 76 in just six weeks
- Gained approximately 20lbs. of lean body mass (note that this was not my goal for the full eighteen months)

... among many other things. Thank you once again, Com. Pavel, for an excellent product!"

—**Felix Niland**, Sydney, Australia

## **After 3 Months... All I Can Say Is "Amazing"**

So over the course of these past three months I have been following a few techniques Pavel presented in *Beyond Bodybuilding*, and I couldn't be more pleased with the results. My bench has shot up more than 30%, I can squat deeper and heavier than ever before; which is amazing considering the fact that I bought this book to get back into training after being put on the sideline by an ACL tear!!! There are countless routines to shake up your game. I couldn't recommend anything more [than this book] for someone who goes to a gym."

—**Dan Michno**, Boise, ID USA

## **I had GREAT, almost unbelievable progress by following the BB routines!**

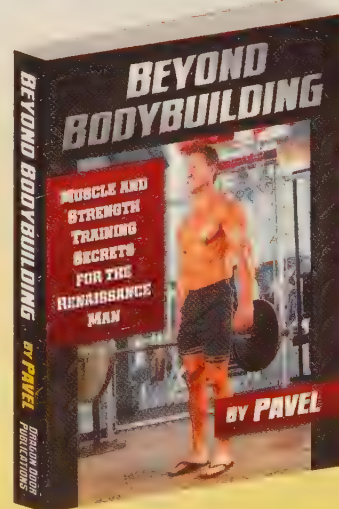
"*Beyond Bodybuilding* is the best compendium of strength and/or muscle building protocols I have ever had the honor to read. It provides both staggering effective routines and the know-how for designing your own programs. If you have no idea where to start your training, just identify your priorities (strength building, muscle hypertrophy or both) and there will be several staggeringly effective protocols suited for your needs in this book.

The "souped up DeLorme hypertrophy protocol" gave me an amazing 11kg [24lbs.] of muscle mass in just 8 weeks, without adding any significant amount of body fat! I was already a big dude, 134-135kg [295 lbs.] at 1.78m [5'11"] height. Simply eating enough to maintain my body mass was a real problem and more muscle hypertrophy seemed almost impossible to reach at my current state. However, the routine added more slabs of pure muscle on my shoulders, back, chest and forearms! I will continue my quest for muscle and might by following Pavel's instructions, and I will keep the Comrades informed by posting my experiences and results on the forum."—**Vlad "The Red Boar" Craioveanu**, Romania

## **The Most Comprehensive Book on Strength Training**

"I started lifting at 13. Now at 40, a Special Agent with the DEA, and a Strength and Conditioning Coach at a local High School where I live. When I read *Beyond Bodybuilding* I couldn't help but wonder where I would be if I had this book 20 years ago. It is the most comprehensive book on strength training I have ever read. As a tactical athlete and coach, I have seen my knowledge of how to train has grown exponentially in a short period of time. I can't thank Pavel enough for putting this book together. I also have read *Power to the People!* and the *Naked Warrior*. All of these books are essential for any athlete who wants to grow physically and intellectually in their pursuit of strength."

—**Tommy Cindric**, Mount Airy, Maryland



## **Beyond Bodybuilding Muscle and Strength Training Secrets for The Renaissance Man By Pavel**

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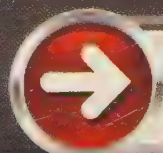
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# Beyond Bodybuilding—a treasure chest of strength training secrets

continued from previous page...

## You Just Have To Get this Book!!

"Pavel focuses on what the trainee needs to make his program effective, whether it is for building mass, or just increasing strength without adding bulk. To the point, and in step-by-step detail. I am nearing completion of his 5x5 routine, and by following it, have made average gains of 18% in strength in just three (3) weeks."

—Mindanao Mike, Mindanao, Philippines

## This is a must have for people interested in strength and getting bigger

"I keep reading this book again and again, there's so much in it. With the 'Hit The Deck Program' I added about 25 pushups to my max in 2 weeks, and before I knew it I could do 100.

There are lots of routines in this book, they will keep you busy for a long time. If you want to get strong, or big and strong, than this book is your choice."—Yoeri, Bocholtz, Netherlands

## If you buy one of Pavel's books, make it this one!

"Using the 'Modified Delorme Method' I gained 40 lbs. on my deadlift and 10 lbs. on my bench press over the course of 8 weeks. I also gained 7 pounds of lean body mass. My training partner saw similar gains with a 40lb. gain on his DL and 15lb. gain on his BP."—Greg Gonzales, Albuquerque, NM

## Immediate relief and gratification

"I've been lifting weights since I was 12. As a Martial Artist and ex USAF Pararescue Specialist I have seen all kinds of products and gimmicks through the years. I'm 45 now and what I have read and learned in this book changed my outlook on lifting weights and saved my back forever.

In just 3 days of working with a few techniques explained in "Solutions for a Tight Back" I eliminated my lower and upper back pain that I have lived with for many years. A must for all serious athletes and professionals who need clear, concise instruction and tips to a STRONGER, PAIN FREE BODY. Pavel has taken the B.S out and has given us information way ahead of its time. It's your choice—you can be mediocre or you can excel to great strengths!"—David Cogswell, Shoreacres, TX

## Section One: Power Training

- The real secret to spectacular strength gains. Page 1
- The basic laws of successful practice—follow these and you can't help but gain and gain and gain. Page 2
- The perfect number of reps for greater strength. Page 3
- How to finish a workout feeling stronger than when you started! Page 2
- The method that did more for a SWAT instructor's strength in a week -- than conventional training in ten previous years! Page 4
- 'Neurological carry-over training' -- the secret technique that resulted in a 1,200 pound squat. Page 4

■ Stuck on your bench press? How the surprising addition of a piece of wood can help you blow through your current plateau. Page 12

■ This high-tonnage program will easily pack ten to fifteen pounds of beef on your frame in less than two months. Page 13

■ A Soviet Special Forces method to pack on the pounds with kettlebells -- despite sleep deprivation, excessive exercise, stress and a limited protein intake. Page 13.

■ How to cheat the 'law of accommodation' -- and gain beyond your wildest dreams. Page 19

■ The only training structure for consistent physical gains that is reliable in the long haul. Page 19

■ How to jolt your system into fresh gains -- without changing any of your favorite exercises.

■ Discover why the Smolov routine has achieved a cult status. Page 21

■ The little-known secret of extensor reflex training can give you a championship edge.

■ Be as strong as an ox! How to use 'after-effect' overloads to make you stronger.

■ How to fool your internal 'governors of strength' into agreeing to let you be stronger.

■ Russian champions consider this the critical component of any strength training. Page 31

■ Build greater strength by employing these three fundamental principles of motor learning.

■ The critical secrets for super-strength

■ Quick! This crash course in the neuroscience of strength may alone be worth the price of this book. Page 41

■ The most reliable muscle and strength building method... period.

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"I wholeheartedly recommend *Beyond Bodybuilding*. I view it as a summation of the accumulated knowledge Pavel Tsatsouline has gathered to this point in his career. Every body part is covered and a blueprint provided for how to build and strengthen every conceivable muscular target. The detail and description is tremendous. The mix between text and photos is spot on; the clarity of the exercise description leaves nothing to the imagination.

Every aspect of training is covered in Pavel's *Beyond Bodybuilding* from flexibility to all types of strength development, U.S.M.C. training, R.K.C. training tips from many of the greatest strength experts around the world, plus a glossary of exercises to fit everyone's needs. I salute Pavel and

*Beyond Bodybuilding.*  
—Louie Simmons,  
Westside Barbell



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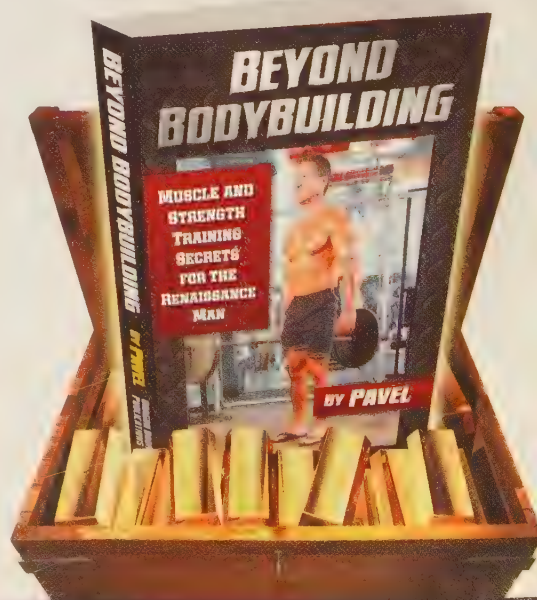
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# ***“Power to the People Professional is another excellent publication from Pavel.***

## **Advanced lifters must read this book.”**

**—Andy Bolton, First Man to Ever Deadlift Over 1,000lbs.**

“I am thoroughly enthralled with *Power to the People Professional*. There is real passion in this book and it shines through in the characters that populate PPP: these men come alive as Pavel breathes life into their unique lives and diverse methods. Per usual, Pavel's impassioned pursuit of various strength methodologies is peerless; his gathering of tactical techniques makes this book a strength and power wellspring. There is enough substance and meat and grit between the covers of this book to keep the serious power man busy for the next five years.

Highest marks. Excellent on a multitude of

levels. This book is a goldmine of tactics and techniques.”

—Marty Gallagher, author of *The Purposeful Primitive*, former Coach IPF Powerlifting Team USA

“Pavel, thank you for bringing us this fantastic training information.”

—Brad Gillingham, 2 Time IPF SHW World Powerlifting Champion

“My thanks for Pavel's *Power to the People Professional*. Though I am not a powerlifter, I

continually run across interesting powerlifting tips I can use in my bodybuilding workouts.

I'm going to rethink some of my workout routines. Thanks again for a great source of training knowledge.”

—Larry Scott, author of *Loaded Guns*, World's First Mr. Olympia

“A marvelous collection of thoughts, ideas and theories by some of the top strength coaches in the world. The book is full of great information.”

—Louie Simmons, Westside Barbell

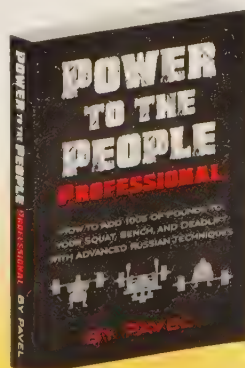
**Just a few of the breakthrough secrets you'll have at your fingertips with Pavel's *Power to the People Professional*.**

- **How Valentin Dikul** went from wheelchair cripple to master of strength... Pages 2—3
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# GREAT ACCLAIM FOR *EASY STRENGTH*

"For me, now 27 years into my coaching career, I have seen, read, and tried a lot of different ideas and training concepts. The information in *Easy Strength* is concrete and useful. *Easy Strength* should be required reading for all strength and conditioning professionals." —Chip Morton, Strength and Conditioning Coach, Cincinnati Bengals

"With *Easy Strength*, Dan John and Pavel have put together a systematic plan where the defined goals lead to the outcome. All of us will benefit from the years of sound scientific principles and real world experience put together in this system. After reading this book you will know where you are, where you are going and exactly how to get there." —Jon Torine, former Strength and Conditioning Coach, Indianapolis Colts

"*Easy Strength* guides you through the essential elements that ensure safe, productive, applicable results. In the development process of enhancing movements there needs to be sound rules and fundamentals that we are rooted in to help hold us accountable, and Pavel and Dan John are on the mark in this book. They have used science and tremendous experience to make this package simple and cut away the clutter that can impair sound prescription." —Jeff Fish, Director of Athletic Performance, Atlanta Falcons

## The New Testament of Training

"As much as I think of *Beyond Bodybuilding*, it is now moved one further out on my shelf so *Easy Strength* can sit side by side with *Supertraining*. If *Supertraining* is the Old Testament of training, I now consider *Easy Strength* to be the

New Testament—and maybe even specifically The Book of Revelation, to add to the metaphor. As Chuck Missler says, 'The New Testament is in the Old Testament concealed; the Old Testament is in the New Testament revealed'. Bingo." —Jack Reape, Dallas, TX

"*Easy Strength* is one of the best books on strength training for sport that I've ever read (and trust me, I've read them ALL). It'll go down as one of the best fitness and conditioning books period. This book goes a long way in revolutionizing the way the modern coach should be approaching sports conditioning. The section on the 4 quadrants alone is worth your entire investment. It will really help 'laserbeam focus' your programming for your athletes." —Alwyn Cosgrove, author of *The New Rules of Lifting* series

"Our most quoted teachers do not seek to dazzle us with their complexity. The great ones use their position to promote understanding and communication of complex material simply and easily. *Easy Strength* is just that kind of work and Pavel and Dan are those kinds of teachers. They provide useable examples and fundamental simplicity. *Easy Strength* is not simply a position statement about fundamentals. It is a step-by-step lesson on how, when and why to use them!" —Gray Cook, author of *Movement*, co-founder of FMS

"I am currently reading *Easy Strength* for the second time. It is absolutely brilliant in its approach to the varying levels of athletes, as a coach for Q3 and Q4 athletes it should be read by every elite level strength coach handling that level of athlete. I am making my entire staff read the book when I am fin-

ished." —Stan Kellers, Assistant Coach of Strength and Conditioning, Cleveland Cavaliers

"*Easy Strength* is difficult to stop reading because it paves a shorter, smoother path to physical prowess by giving the athlete room to develop. The four quadrants that Pavel and Dan outline help you quickly determine which range of training qualities are ideal for any athlete. The authors effectively strip away the complexities of training that were made from novice coaches who constantly pushed their athletes to the brink.

You'll gain an incredible amount of insight for training beginner to elite athletes, and you'll discover the tricks for knowing when it's overwhelming their capacity. Plus, there's a lifetime worth of sample training regimens that give the muscles and nerves just enough of what they need." —Chad Waterbury, neurophysiologist, author of *Huge in a Hurry*

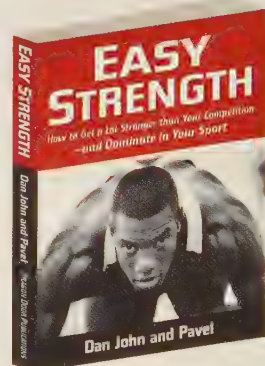
"A fascinating book that challenges many established ideas about strength and power training for athletes. Must reading for champions, champions to be, and those who coach and train them." —Brooks Kubik, author of *Dinosaur Training*

"This is the best single book imaginable for the apprentice athlete looking to excel within their chosen sport. Regardless the sport and regardless the young athlete's current condition, capacity or capabilities, reading, absorbing and applying the strategies contained in *Easy Strength* will result in improvement in every aspect of the athletic equation. My feeling is that the integration of disciplines in *Easy Strength* is its

strongest attribute: blending disciplines in a balanced, realistic, effective way is the highest expression of the art and science of performance improvement. My highest recommendation." —Marty Gallagher, author of *The Purposeful Primitive*, 3-Time World Master Powerlifting Champion, former columnist for WashingtonPost.com

"I will do my very best to promote *Easy Strength* not just because of its authors but because it is necessary for anyone who needs to be stronger for a purpose!" —Barry Ross, author of *Underground Secrets to Faster Running*

"*Easy Strength* is full of information on how to become a better athlete. How? By learning how to train optimally." —Louie Simmons, Founder of Westside Barbell



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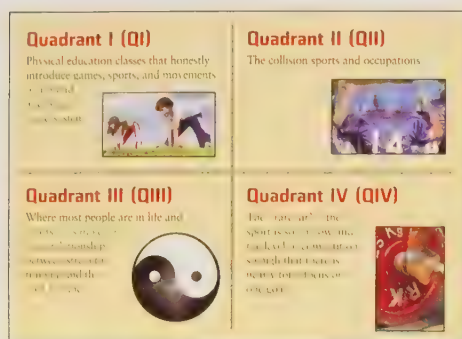
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**QI:** Lots of Qualities at a Low Level of Relative Max

**QII:** Lots of Qualities at a High Level of Relative Max

**QIII:** Few Qualities at a Low or Moderate Level of Relative Max

**QIV:** Few (or One) Qualities at the Highest Level of Relative Max



Kettlebell Exercises and Programs (and a Few Other Things) in Quadrants  
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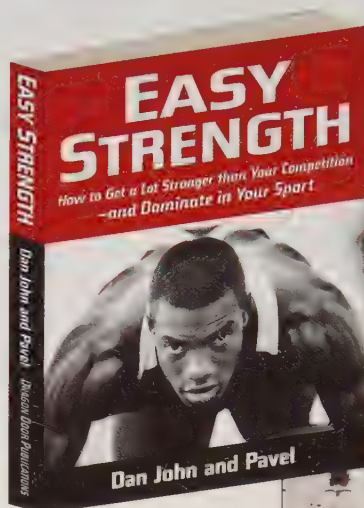
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**"Easy Strength** is a masterpiece from two of the best in the business of strength and conditioning. Pavel and Dan John's book will help you improve your performance—no matter what your sport. It doesn't matter whether you are a weekend gym warrior, competitive athlete or coach... you owe it to yourself to read this book. The bottom line is that it will help you become stronger, faster and more powerful in the most efficient way possible..." —Andy Bolton, 6-Time World Powerlifting Champion

# How To Look Like Tarzan, Play Like Tarzan— And Win Like Tarzan

## What It Takes to Stack the Strength-Deck in Your Favor

**"I**f football were played in the weight room or on the track, I could guarantee that each year, the team that won the championship would NOT be the team that won on the field of play. And that is absolutely true in every sport and every game. It's a rare track meet that you don't hear someone rhapsodize about training numbers and then see him or her lose badly. In football, we have a phrase for this: 'Looks like Tarzan, plays like Jane.'

### What can you expect from reading this book?

- You will learn some history. You will discover that almost everything discussed in the fitness industry has been done before—and often better.
- You will reexamine the role of strength training as it applies to sport. Doing so may serve as the greatest timesaver in history!
- You will find that, like a medical doctor, a strength coach must be committed above all to 'Do no harm'—a pledge that's often disregarded.
- You will be exposed to the concept of systematic education and the need to build an athlete (or anyone!) using some kind of intelligent approach.
- You will be exposed to another educational system—along with a way to harness its powers—that will give you clarity into all the various fitness, health, and nutritional information being tossed at you daily.
- You will discover the tools for teaching an entire team to improve in a sport—and why these great tools may be of no value to you in your training!
- You will be exposed to what the best in sports do in the weight room, and you will discover why it will apply to everything you decide to do.
- You will learn many of the 'champion's secrets' and be amazed at the simplicity, as well as the insightfulness, of what the best do."

—Dan John, from the preface to *Easy Strength*.

Pavel and my goal in writing this book is to clarify the role and impact of strength training in fitness, sports, and life. We are committed to clarity, even though at times, it's impossible to navigate the sea of conflicting information regarding the lifting sports. Pavel's experience and research provides grounding and a confidence to 'Do this!' as we often joke.

"I made the mistake of cracking open my review copy of *Easy Strength* at 11pm last night. It grabbed me from the first page and the next thing I knew I had pulled an all-nighter finishing the book in one sitting. Not a common thing in a strength book! It is that good. *Easy Strength* is a work of art and sure to be a classic go-to book for the modern coach. The pages are so full of gold you should consider changing the title to *El Dorado*."

—Jon Engum, Master RKC, Grandmaster, 7th Degree Black Belt, Taekwondo

"This book kicks some SERIOUS ass!! Pavel and Dan put together a simple to understand and easy to apply training regime for athletes and for those of us who want to train AND perform like athletes. I've seen MANY books based completely on the science of training athletes, but from my own experience, when you train athletes in the real world you need to learn how to tweak science.

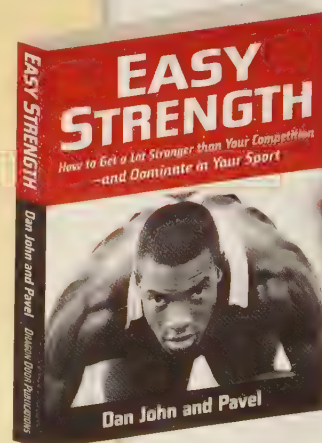
*"Easy Strength* is what I see as the blend of science, real world experience and application blended together in an easily understood manner without needing a PhD. to understand what you're reading. You just can't go wrong when reading what Dan and Pavel put together."

—Zach Even-Esh, Founder, Underground Strength Gym

"If you could sit at a table with two of the smartest, most experienced and most respected names in strength and listen in on their conversation, would you do it? What if they were also two of the best communicators, men who are known for taking complex info and distilling it down into easily-digestible, family-sized portions? I have had the good fortune of being able to do that very thing on more than one occasion and *Easy Strength* often reads like someone transcribed one of these conversations.

Pavel and Dan open up on the subject of strength, why it is important and how to develop it. This book is a wealth of information for anyone interested in getting stronger."

—David Whitley, Master RKC Instructor



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Than Your Competition—  
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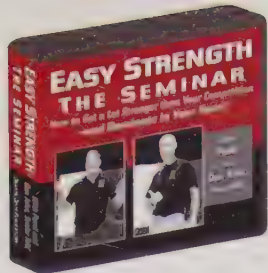
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# Praise for Pavel and Dan John's EASY STRENGTH Seminar

"I now have a very clear path on how I can help the law enforcement and military community without burning them out. This workshop was like attending four years of college on how to deliver fast and simple results to your clients."

Pavel and Dan are just unbelievable and they are like training encyclopedias. I learned more in three days than I have in the last 10 years of attending other workshops, seminars and reading books."

—**JOEY WILLIAMS**, Pacifica, CA, Police Officer, Law Enforcement Weaponless Defense Instructor, Impact Weapons Defense Instructor, Police Academy Drill Instructor

"The single most comprehensive seminar in strength, the acquisition of strength, and the practice of strength that I've ever been to."

—**GEOFF NEUPERT**, Master RKC, Durham, NC

"I feel that I am coming away with an impressive and extensive supply of training tools and methods. Every topic felt applicable to my own practice, and the service of my clients and customers."

This workshop probably had 2 times the scope of material than any other specific course I have taken. I found all the information practical."

—**SOMNATH SIKDAR**, Personal Trainer, Dragon Gym Owner, Exton, PA

"There are only a few people in the world with this level and combination of scientific and real world knowledge and they rarely talk about it live. This was one of those times that you could pick up a lifetime of knowledge over a weekend. Priceless."

Quality and scope were excellent, but what will really separate this material is the practical use. It makes the training done by real professionals accessible to the average person."

—**BUD JEFFRIES**, Lakeland, FL, Performing Strongman, Author, Lifetime Drug Free World's Powerlifting Champion, Strongman champion, MMA/Grappling Fighter, Highland Games Champion, Strength Coach.

"I learned more in the three days here than I learned

in my life training! Pavel's straightforward way of showing the techniques and delivering his message was gold. Dan John made everything come together! The way he showed everyone the four quadrants works. It took the guessing game away and now I know if someone wants to lose weight or gain muscle, all I have to do is go for the four quadrants. Love it! Now I have the missing link to better my clients and myself."

—**PETER VIEIRA**, East Providence, Rhode Island, Firefighter

"I have been to numerous NSCA, Westside, RKC workshops and seminars and have never been to anything this good. I feel privileged to have participated. These two distilled a vast quality of knowledge and communicated it with a great effectiveness."

I feel like I have absorbed about two years of a college major in strength development in three days."

—**ANDREW BENDER**, Chelmsford MA, personal trainer

This workshop is a must if you are serious about being a successful coach or trainer. If you want to have a clear concise understanding of what it takes to be a strength coach, and how to properly approach your clients, athletes or students needs, then you will take this course! This was by far the most in depth, informative course that I have ever attended!

—**JUSTIN "TRUSTY" GARFIELD**, Waianae, HI, Strength & Conditioning Coach, Gym Owner

"This seminar has been incredibly eye opening for me. The knowledge I have gained will significantly alter the course of all of my future training. This was truly life changing. This seminar has been the greatest 3 days of my training career. It will significantly alter how I train myself and my students."

—**CHRIS LINDQUIST**, East Fallowfield, PA, Veterinarian

"It has linked together every aspect of training and every Dragon Door related training program in such a way as to make someone almost unstoppable when the scientific strength secrets are not over thought, but

simply applied."

Pavel and Dan have taken exercise science and effectively applied it to real world scenarios. Every other training course I have had outside of the RKC system has revolved around a lot of text book knowledge with little-to-no real world application."

—**ANDREW LYONS**, Columbus, OH, Physical Therapist

"Outstanding! Excellent course that must be repeated, it would be a shame if we were to be the only group to have had the privilege. These men obviously have much more to give. And even though I was able to learn some incredible information this week I am looking forward to what is next. In the meantime I will spend my time practicing the knowledge I take home. These are professional of the utmost quality."

This course has been by far the most comprehensive highest quality and useful course I have ever taken."

—**K.C. REITER**, Chico, CA, Fitness Trainer

"Pavel and Dan have managed to cram a lifetime of strength coaching experience into 3 days. The incredibly complex problems of human performance were distilled, in typical Dragon Door/Pavel style into simple and easy to understand frame works. Pavel and Dan John are as advertised. World Class experts on strength training who can make the complex single. As with every event I have attended – magnificent. The cost of the trip and course (\$6000 AUD) will easily be earned back."

—**ANDREW READ**, Melbourne, Australia, RKC Team Leader

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**ATTENTION: POWERLIFTERS, STRENGTH  
ATHLETES AND HARD TRAINING INDIVIDUALS...**

# **How To Squat For Maximum STRENGTH And With Minimum Injury-Risk. Guaranteed**

**Regardless Of Your Current Experience Level, Here's How To  
Squat The Right Way... So That You Develop The STRENGTH  
You Deserve And The Kind Of Leg Power That Will Enable  
You To Dominate Your Training Partners In The Gym  
And Annihilate Your Rivals In The Heat Of Competition...**

**T**he squat is considered "the kind of all exercises". Most Powerlifters, Strongmen, Bodybuilders and other hard training individuals agree on this point. The fact is that if YOU want big, muscular legs and unstoppable lower body power – you gotta squat.

But the trouble is – hardly anyone squats with good form (many high level athletes included). And squatting with bad form is a recipe for weak legs and potential injury.

Not good.

But who should you trust to teach you the squat?

The simple answer is that it doesn't get any better than powerlifting legend and owner of the biggest combined squat and deadlift ever – Andy Bolton.

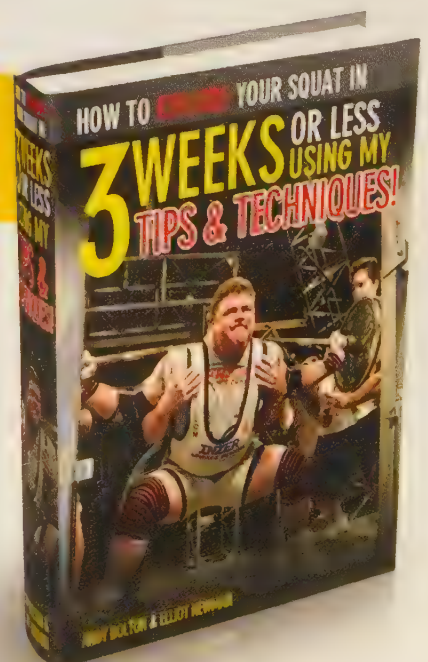
Andy has a 1214lbs squat to his name and is one of the greatest squatters *of all time*. If anyone can help you squat right and squat big – Andy can.

**In Andy's book  
Explode Your Squat, you'll discover:**

- Exactly how to **master your squat form**, from start to finish
- How to trouble-shoot your *unique weaknesses* and then correct them
- Secrets, tips and tricks for instantly improving your squat technique and increasing your squat numbers

When you want to master anything, it is wise to learn from THE BEST. When it comes to squatting, Andy Bolton is your man. Grab a copy of **Explode Your Squat** today and prepare to say "Hello" to a bigger, stronger squat and legs of steel...

**Click the link below to grab your copy now:**  
<http://www.andyboltonstrength.org/explode-your-squat-cb.htm>



# How To Turn Yourself Into A Super-Strong Squat, Bench And Deadlift MACHINE..."

**Finally... Powerlifting Legend And King Of The Deadlift, Andy Bolton, Shows YOU How To Develop Brutal STRENGTH And A Huge Squat, Bench And Deadlift...**

**O**n 4th November 2006, in Lake George, New York, powerlifting legend Andy Bolton did the unthinkable, producing a feat of STRENGTH nobody thought would ever be done... a bit like the 4 minute mile, but arguably way more impressive.

Andy deadlifted 1003lbs.

Strength coach extraordinaire and owner of the legendary Westside Barbell, Louie Simmons, said that he didn't think it possible for any man to ever deadlift over 1000lbs. But Andy did.

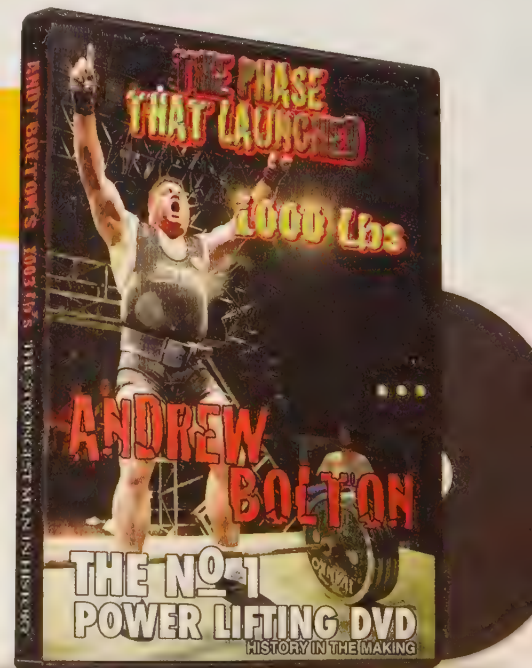
And whilst Andy can't promise that you'll ever deadlift 1003lbs (or even 1008lbs like he went on to do in April 2009), what he can promise YOU is this...

When you grab a copy of The Phase *That Launched 1000lbs* DVD, you will get STRONGER.

A *lot* stronger.

## In this ultra-high quality DVD you'll discover:

- Exactly how Andy trained for his **world record squats and deadlifts** – copy his training programs and watch your strength EXPLODE
- How to make your back *incredibly strong* using Andy's favourite assistance exercises (NOTE: A strong man has a strong back and a weak man has a weak back – it's as simple as that)
- How to peak for competition and avoid the frustration of leaving your best lifts in the gym
- How to EAT to **add muscle mass** and limit fat-gain (Andy has been as low as 13% body-fat – incredible for a man weighing 365lbs)
- Andy's number 1 assistance exercise for the deadlift and why it should be yours too



**Click the link below to grab your copy now:**

<http://www.andyboltonstrength.org/the-phase-that-launched-1000lbs-dvd.htm>



**W**hen you grab your copy of The Phase That Launched 1000lbs DVD, you'll also get exclusive interviews with legendary strongman Geoff Capes (former World's Strongest Man) and world renowned strength coach Brian Batchelor.

If you are serious about building your squat, bench press and deadlift, and you'd like to possess the kind of strength that allows you to *totally dominate your competitors in any athletic arena* – you need your very own copy of this awesome DVD today.

Here's what people say about *The Phase That Launched 1000lbs DVD*:

"Hi Andy,

Back in January my wife contacted you and ordered your Phase That Launched 1000lbs DVD. You were kind enough to sign the DVD and a photo and send it to me while out in Afghanistan. I just wanted to thank you personally... your DVD inspired us, we got so into training that we used to forget about the threat we faced every day as we were more concerned about getting in the gym. (typical squadie mentality)

Again thank you and all the best for the future."

–Wayne Dolecki, Armed Forces, England

"Andy, I've just finished watching your DVD. It's an inspiration. I've got lots of new ideas to improve my training and I can't wait to try them out. Thanks!"

–Russell, Powerlifter, England

"It's amazing to watch Andy train in this DVD. The information is simple to understand and it has helped me add weight to the bar. Exactly what I wanted. It's very unusual for a world class athlete to show you the exact training cycles that they have used to produce world records, but Andy doesn't hold anything back here. It's very interesting.

The DVD is a very high quality recording and I'd highly recommend it to anyone who wants to get stronger."

–Luke Powerlifter, England

"I received my 2 DVDs from Andy this week and they are great. First of all the shipping to the U.S. was very fast. The seminar DVD covers everything from preparing for a competition, as well as when to back off from the weights during training. The detail Andy goes into on the squat, bench and deadlift is fantastic; he

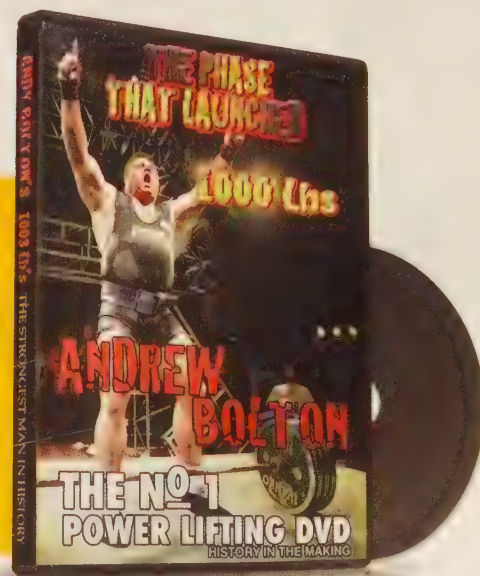
shares his setup for all of the lifts and how he uses explosive power to lift the huge numbers he has done.

I have been to one of Andy's seminars and having this DVD helps me revisit some of the key points he talks about. The training DVD goes over Andy's training when he deadlifted the 1003lbs. If you were wondering what he meant by explosive power, you will see it in this DVD; incredible!

His weekly squat and deadlift cycle is laid out as well as his daily nutrition during the phase that preceded the 1003 deadlift and the 1214 squat. I cannot recommend these DVD enough, I have already watched them a couple of times (especially before training).

–Tony DiLiegro, Powerlifter, USA

So if you're ready to let a living strength legend help you get brutally strong in double-quick time, click the link below to order your copy of The Phase That Launched 1000lbs DVD...



Click the link below to grab your copy now:

<http://www.andyboltonstrength.org/the-phase-that-launched-1000lbs-dvd.htm>

Take Your Strength To The 'Next Level'...

# How To Use Bands And Chains To Build Brutal STRENGTH And Explosive POWER

**If You Want To Become More Athletic, BLAST Through Annoying Sticking Points With Ease And SMASH Your Personal Bests With New Levels Of Strength And Power – This Is Essential Reading...**

**U**sing bands and chains as part of your strength training workouts is one of the easiest ways to *take your strength and power to the next level*. And it doesn't matter what you train for: powerlifting, boxing, MMA, self-defense, football, rugby or sprinting – more strength and power will help your performance.

But the truth is that very few people know about bands and chains and fewer still know how to use them properly. Improperly used they can be a total waste of time, or worse still – can actually cause a lack of progress and even injury.

So you have to know what you're doing.

Which is why I wrote my book titled, Bands & Chains... to show you how to use these amazing training tools properly – so you develop as much STRENGTH and POWER as you possibly can and dominate your competition, whatever your sport or athletic pursuit.

## In Bands And Chains you'll discover:

- How to use BANDS and CHAINS on your Squat, Bench and Deadlift
- How to develop more **speed, strength and power** than ever before
- How to use bands to enable you to get a full body workout (no gym required)
- How to train your *most important muscles* for the Bench Press using Chains
- How to **Stretch with bands...** (no more boring static stretching required)
- How to use 2 different styles of band training - both very effective for developing starting strength and LOCKOUT POWER

So what are you waiting for?

Grab your copy of Bands & Chains today and prepare to say "hello" to a new level of maximal STRENGTH, speed and explosive power.



**Click the link below to order *Bands & Chains* now:**

<http://www.andyboltonstrength.org/bands-and-chains.htm>



# Dragon Door

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# How to Build Supreme Strength and Explosive Power—Faster, More Effectively and More Safely

## A Progressive Program of Proven Methods for Getting Stronger and Staying Stronger—The World Champion's Way

**T**he deadlift can lay serious claim to be the single most important exercise you can ever do—if your goal is to develop supreme strength and total body power. And who better to help you to achieve your ultimate strength and power gains than 6-time world champion and multiple record holder, **Andy Bolton**—backed by the expertise of renowned strength authority, **Pavel Tsatsouline**?

The first section of *Deadlift Dynamite* “How to Lift”, provides a safe, progressive, technically-detailed plan on how to get started right in the iron game, avoid the typical mistakes and years of frustration, and see extraordinary results in even the first year of training. Intermediate lifters will appreciate the world of subtle tips and masterly insights—which will help them bust through plateaus and surge forward in their gains. And the savvy coach will recognize he now owns the ultimate blueprint for producing champions—in many athletic fields.

Whether your goal is to excel in the sport of powerlifting or you just want to become stronger and more muscular—*Deadlift Dynamite* is for you. There are many approaches to muscle and strength building, some effective, more marginal, most nearly worthless. Powerlifting's half century of existence has undeniably proven that this sport offers the most time-efficient methods for making you big and strong.

As one of the strongest men on the planet, Andy Bolton's contribution to *Deadlift Dynamite* is unassailable—yet couched

in a simple, direct and totally accessible style. Pavel's goal is to compress the period it would take you to master championship lifting technique, like Andy's, from decades to years and even months—while avoiding the many health problems lifters who train incorrectly develop along the way.

Discover also Pavel's state of the art flexibility and mobility exercises specific to lifting—exercises which have received a strong thumbs up from the elite of the iron game. The secondary goal of these exercises is health and longevity. The primary goal is strength.

When it comes to programming for world-class lifts, Andy Bolton is the undisputed results-master. In *Deadlift Dynamite* the champion reveals his classic templates that have helped him earn title after title—and can forever turn around your own success as a conqueror of the unforgiving iron.

The second section “How to Lift More” is aimed at the experienced lifter. Pavel and Andy go into great detail describing the deeper subtleties of world-class deadlift technique and teach you state of the art assistance exercises.

While the deadlift is the focal point of the book, the squat and the bench press also receive the attention they deserve—to provide lifters of all levels the absolute essentials to excel in these great lifts as well.

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